

ESSAYS

On the following

SUBJECTS.

- I. On the Reality and Evidence of *Miracles*, especially those on which the *Jewish* and Christian Religion are built: And on those which were wrought by *Moses* in *Egypt*: And why stiled by God his Judgments on the *Egyptian* Deities. *Exod. xii. 12.*
- II. On the extraordinary Adventure of *Balaam*, the famed Eastern Prophet and Diviner. *Num. xxii. & seq.*
- III. On the surprising March, and signal Victory, gained by *Jeshua* over *Jabin* King of *Hazor*, and his numberless Confederates. *Josh. x.*
- IV. On the religious War of the *Israelitish* Tribes against that of *Benjamin*, and the almost total Destruction of that impious Tribe. *Jud. xviii. & seq.*
- V. On the amazing speedy Relief which *Saul*, the newly chosen King of *Israel*, brought to the besieged Inhabitants of *Jabesh-Gilead*; and the signal Overthrow which he gave to the *Ammonites*, and their Confederates. *1 Sam. xi.*

WHEREIN

The most considerable *OBJECTIONS* raised against each respective Subject, are fully answered; the *DIFFICULTIES* removed; and each of these remarkable *TRANSACTIONS* accounted for, in a rational Way.

Written some Years since, at the Desire, and for the Use, of a young Clergyman in the Country.

By an *OBSCURE LAYMAN* in Town:

And now published, on occasion of some late Attempts made to disprove the Probability, and even Possibility, of all *MIRACLES*; particularly, by a pretended *Moral Philosopher*; and more lately, by an *Essay-Writer* on some philosophical Subjects.

L O N D O N :

Printed for A. MILLAR, in the Strand.

M.DCC.LIII.

On the following

2. H. B. J. E. C. T. 3.

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The most considerable Objections are answered; the Divine
revelative Duties are fully answered; the Divine
duties removed; and each of the remarkable
Transactions recommended in a rational way.

Young Christian in the country.

by an Officer of LAYMAN in Town:

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MILLER



THE
P R E F A C E.

THE following Essays, among many more of the same Nature, were written, as is hinted in the Title-Page, at the Desire, and for the Use, of a young Clergyman; and transmitted to him in so many Letters, on the following laudable Occasion. His Friends had procured him a considerable Benefice in the Country, where he no sooner came to reside, than he was attacked by several of his Neighbours, most of them Men of Wit and Figure, and professed Sceptics, about the above-mentioned, and other scriptural Subjects, of the like important Nature; in which he had the Misfortune to be so lit-

tle versed, that he must, in all Likelihood, have become the frequent Subject of their Raillery, and led a very uneasy Life among them, had not his good Sense, and singular Modesty, directed him to an Expedient, that would at least intitle him to, if not procure him, better Quarter from them : And this was, by ingenuously owning himself, as yet, too young, and unacquainted with the Topicks they urged against him, to enter the Lists with such seasoned Opponents ; and begging of them, for Truth's sake, that he might be allowed the Liberty of turning these Points in Dispute over to a Person whom he knew to have been, of a long time, conversant with that kind of Learning ; and who had lately published some occasional Remarks upon sundry Subjects of the like controverted Nature, which had been well received by the Public. So just and modest a Proposal could hardly fail of being complied with ; and they came into it the more readily, it seems, when he apprised them, that the Person he designed to apply to was an obscure Layman, who
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had spent a great Part of his latter Years in Privacy and Retirement; and who, he had Reason to believe, was in no way addicted or bigotted to either Party or Opinion. They only expressed a Desire to know his Name, and such other Particulars as he should think fit to acquaint them with; both which he declined to do, without my Leave, lest that should induce me to refuse the Task; as he was fully apprised of the Care I had taken to conceal my being the Author of those Productions from all but a few select Friends. I failed not, in my next Letter, to thank him for his kind Caution; and to assure him of my Unwillingness to comply with his Request upon any other Terms: To which he informed me, soon after, they all readily acquiesced: Immediately after which our epistolary Correspondence began, and each of the Subjects in Debate were regularly conveyed to me by him, with full Liberty of methodizing both the Objections and Answers, in such manner as I thought would prove most convincing

and satisfactory to them; or to the Public, in case I should be inclined to make them so.

This Licence proved the more acceptable to me, because, though I had then no View of printing them, yet I found the most serious of those Subjects treated by his Antagonists in so trivial and ludicrous a manner, as if they had been fitter for Ridicule, than an impartial Examination. So that I made no Difficulty to take them at their Word, and to retrench as much of the sarcastical Pleasantry out of their Objections, as I found void of Reasoning; as well as to soften the Profaneness and Scurrility of their Language, where-ever it could be done without lessening the Weight and Strength of their Objections. And thus much may suffice for the Occasion of my writing these Essays.

I must, however, acquaint the Reader, that the five above-mentioned Subjects were not the only controverted ones that were sent to me from the same Quarter. Several others they

they successively communicated to me, no less curious and important: Some of which, I found, had been so fully and learnedly treated, by a Set of Gentlemen, in a late extensive Work, that I made no Scruple to refer our Antagonists to it, for a satisfactory Answer to all their Objections (a). Of this Nature were those two miraculous Transactions, mentioned in the Old Testament; viz. the Passage of the *Israelites* through the *Red Sea* (*Exod. xiv.*); and the supernatural Solstice obtained by *Joshua*, their new Chief, in the Land of *Canaan* (*Josh. x.*): To which I may add a third, which gave me no less Pleasure to find so justly and evidently cleared by those curious Gentlemen, and in a manner entirely new; viz. the different Genealogies given of Christ, in the Gospels of *St. Matthew* and *St. Luke* (b); a Point that hath lately exercised some of our best Heads. And this I the more readily did, in hopes

(a) *Un. Hist.* 8vo. vol. iii. p. 390, & seq. 496, & seq.

(b) *Ibid.* vol. x. p. 451, & seq. (R).

hopes that if I could, by that means, bring my polemic Correspondents to be better acquainted with that extensive Work, they would find so many Difficulties of the like Nature so satisfactorily cleared, as would, of course, much lessen the Matter of this our epistolary Controversy, as well as induce them to treat these serious and important Subjects in a less ludicrous and offensive manner.

As for the Occasion of my now publishing the five following ones, I shall not insist here on the kind Invitations I had to it, from some of my worthy Country Friends, who had both perused them, and been Witnesses of the good Effect they had on some of my young Clergyman's Antagonists; for if that had had a sufficient Weight with me, they had appeared in Print some Years ago. Neither could the various Attempts that have been made, from time to time, by so many eminent Hands, against the Authority of the sacred Books, have induced me to it since then;

then ; because I could see neither Objection nor Argument in any of them, if we except, perhaps, the Newness and Variety of their Dress, but had been fully exploded over and over, by Persons of equal Sense and Learning, and much superior to them, in the learned World's Eye, in point of Judgment, and fair solid Reasoning ; and (what could not but lessen one's Value of them) without paying any Regard to, or taking the least Notice of, what had been so often, and so powerfully, urged on the other Side of the Question. This Treatment appears still the more unfair, as they have not hitherto made any fresh Attack on their Side, but hath been soon after fairly examined and confuted on ours ; and, I may add, in a more civil, serious, candid, and impartial Way, than we have, as yet, met from them, though they so frequently charge us with the contrary Behaviour ; but how justly, let every Reader judge, from all that hath been written on either Side. I was therefore so well satisfied, upon the Whole, that the Foundation of the

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the *Jewish* and Christian Revelation, as well as the Evidence of the Miracles upon which both are built, were out of all Danger of being shaken by any Attempt that had hitherto been made, or, as I imagined, could be made, against it from that Quarter, that I could not suppose this occasional Performance of mine could add any Weight to that Variety of solid Arguments, and Cloud of unquestionable Testimonies, that had been urged in its Defence. I was rather in hopes, that after the Divine Authority both of the Law and Gospel had been so clearly and learnedly demonstrated, all the other Difficulties and Cavils which have been raised against them, would easily have yielded to that superior Evidence, and have subsided of their own Accord; instead of furnishing our Sceptic Opponents with fresh Occasion of discrediting and ridiculing the sacred Records, by magnifying and misrepresenting those Difficulties at the unfair Rate they have lately done, and as if they were of themselves sufficient to invalidate their divine Authority, and

and the Credibility of the great and manifold Miracles upon which it is founded (c). But as those further Exceptions could never be deemed, by the serious Part of Mankind, sufficient to outweigh so great an Evidence, a new Expedient must be thought on, that might at once overturn both the Foundation and Superstructure; and that was, by trying to destroy, not only the Probability, but even the Possibility, of all Miracles. To this End, among other Champions, one of them, a professed Infidel, boldly enters the Lists, under the Disguise of a *Moral Philosopher*; and not only attacks the greatest and best attested Miracle of the Gospel, against the learned Author of the Trial of the Witnesses (d); but, on the Strength of an imaginary Victory, concludes that indigested Performance with what he styles a full and unanswerable Confutation of the Reality and Possibility of any of the rest: His swelling Style induces

(c) See the Author of the *Characteristics*, Collins, Tindal, Chubb, &c.

(d) *Resurrection considered*, p. 89, & seq.

one to believe, that he comes fraught with some new-set Arguments, that will give a decisive Blow to the Controversy between us; whilst, in Fact, he produces none but such trite and exploded ones, as give Reason to expect, that something more effectual is still behind, and kept in reserve for the concluding Blow; without which one would hardly have the Patience to follow him through so much Scurrility, Arrogance, and Impiety; and you are not apprised of your Mistake, till you are insensibly brought to the End of the Book.

This Piece, however, which had so little Novelty to recommend it, except the Boldness and Inveteracy of its Style, gave our Country Antagonists such new Matter for Triumph, that my young Clergyman was forced to call upon me for fresh Assistance; every Argument in it appearing to them both new and decisive, so little were they versed in that trite Controversy: And I should have had the irksome Task of confuting them, had not

not I been timely relieved by a much abler Hand, which appeared soon after, in the Defence of the *Trial of the Witnesses*; and, in a few Pages at the End of it, exploded all his pretended Reasoning against the Possibility of Miracles, in so clear, nervous, and convincing a manner (e), as, I doubted not, would, upon the bare Reading, effectually satisfy them, and excuse my proceeding farther upon that Head, as well as from publishing any of the other Subjects of our epistolary Controversy; unless some future, and more proper, Occasion should induce me to it. But this, I imagined, would not be in Haste, considering the signal Defeat which that daring Champion had met with, after having spent so long a time in raking up all the Objections, and sophistical Reasoning, of his whole unbelieving Tribe, against the Possibility of all Miracles, and in dressing them up in the most assuming and invidious Terms; for this bold Piece did not appear in Print, till the incomparable

(e) *Evidence of the Resurrection cleared*, p. 143, & seq.

parable one he pretended to answer had gone through a tenth Edition : And it was, in all Likelihood, the Success, and universal Approbation, this last so justly met with, that caused such an extraordinary Profusion of Gall in our pretended Moral Philosopher, beyond what is usually met with in the Writings of his Brethren : So that it was now high time for them to look out for some skilful Hand, to wipe off, as much as possible, the Discredit which that frantic Performance had done to them, and their Cause ; by resuming its Defence, if not by a new Recruit of more solid Arguments (their Logic and Philosophy having been long exhausted), by dressing the old exploded ones in such a polite and artful Trim, as might carry, at least, the Appearance of Novelty ; and thereby the more easily insinuate them into the Minds of the Thoughtless and Unwary, without giving such great Offence to those of the opposite Side.

And here I cannot pretend to say how many Hands engaged in this new Attempt. I
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rather wonder, that any should, where so little Thanks and Credit were to be gained; and where the only plausible Pretext for so doing, viz. the promoting of natural Religion, or moral Virtue, and the Happiness of Society, had been so fairly exploded; and their Writings proved, by so many able Pens, to tend to undermine and ruin them both: Inasmuch that one of the politest of them, and a strenuous Opposer of revealed Religion, makes no Difficulty to own its superior Influence on the Lives and Conduct of Mankind, to all the other Topicks which he had put into the Mouth of his *Epicurean* Philosopher; and to conclude his Argument with this notable Remark; which, whether meant in Earnest or no, must needs carry its own Evidence with it, in the Judgment of every strict Observer of Mankind: His Words are these (f): *Whether this Reasoning of theirs (about the Rewards and Punishments of a future State) be just or not, is no Matter.*

Its
(f) *Hume's Essay on particular Providence, and future State, p. 231.*

Its Influence on their Life and Conduct must still be the same. And those who attempt to disabuse them, may, for ought I know, be good Reasoners; but I cannot allow them to be good Citizens and Politicians: Since they free Men from one Restraint upon their Passions, and make the Infringement of the Laws of Equity and Society, in one respect, more easy and secure,

Now, if the Notion of future Rewards and Punishments, founded on a mere abstract Reasoning, be allowed to be of any Efficacy towards the Preservation of the Peace and Interest of Society; how much greater Influence must it be supposed to have on the Minds and Actions of Men; when once firmly believed to be founded on the Authority of a Divine Revelation; and such a Revelation, as is so exactly calculated to promote the most social and exalted Virtues, and to enforce them, by the noblest and most powerful Motives? Inasmuch that, were it not built on so strong a Foundation, it would

would be hardly possible for a sincere Well-wisher to human Society, not to wish it were so. And may we not here safely pronounce that Author to be a much worse Politician and Commonwealth's-man, who hath taken such extraordinary Pains to overturn, burlesque, and ridicule it, if not with such scurrilous and inveterate Malice as his Predecessor had done, yet with such subtle and sophistical Reasoning, and dogmatic Arrogance, as if the Peace and Welfare of Mankind depended wholly on its Ruin (g)? If the former therefore hath been so justly censured for his splenetic and blasphemous Language, even by those who are no Enemies, in other respects, to his Way of Thinking; some decent Regard being certainly due to that Authority, from which we derive the Liberty we enjoy, of free speaking and writing; what must a sober Reader think of the latter, who, without producing one new Argument against the Reality and Evidence of those Miracles, upon which it is founded, or

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(g) See his *Essay on Miracles*, pass.

taking the least Notice, how clearly and fully all his old ones against it had been exploded, by so many Persons of Learning and Merit, makes no Scruple to pronounce them mere Delusions, Forgery, and Impositions upon Mankind, merely on account of their being Miracles? So that, according to him, every Man of Sense may, and ought to reject them, without farther Trial or Regard, either to the Authority they claim, or any Evidence or Testimony, how great soever, that is urged in Defence of them (b). How much behind his Brother he comes, in his bitter, as well as unjust, Reflections against the Christian Revelation, may be judged, among many other Instances, by this one Scantling, with which he concludes his Essay: Where having told his Reader, but a Page or two before, *that our most holy Religion* (so he is pleased to stile it, in an ironical Sneer) *is founded on Faith, and not on Reason; and that it is the surest Way to expose it, to put it to such a Trial, as it is by no means fit to endure* (i); he closes up the

(b) See Hume's Essay on Miracles, p. 179, & seq.

(i) Ibid. p. 205.

the Whole with these remarkable Words (k);
 “ So that, upon the Whole, we may conclude,
 “ that the Christian Religion was at first not
 “ only attended with Miracles, but even at
 “ this Day cannot be believed, by any rea-
 “ sonable Person, without one. Mere Rea-
 “ son is insufficient to convince us of its Ve-
 “ racity; and whoever is moved by Faith
 “ to assent to it, is conscious of a Miracle
 “ in his own Person; which subverts all the
 “ Principles of his Understanding, and gives
 “ him a Determination to believe, what is
 “ most contrary to Custom and Experience.”

I am willing to hope, however, that the sincere
 Professors of that holy Religion will be able
 to draw a much juster Conclusion from his
 Premises; and that the Sight of so much
 Learning, Philosophy, and subtle Reasoning,
 display'd in Defence of so bad a Cause, will
 direct them to discover the real Miracle,
 where this Author least expects it; whilst
 it reminds them of the many signal Instances
 in which the Divine Providence hath, ac-

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(k) See Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, p. 207.

cording to an express Promise, visibly interposed, in confounding the Wisdom of the Learned, and defeating the Counsels of the Prudent and Crafty of this World (l).

What I would farther observe, with respect to this notable Conclusion, is his shrewd Manner of introducing it, two or three Pages before, in these Terms: *I am the better pleased with this Method of Reasoning, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous Friends, or disguised Enemies, to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the Principles of human Reason* (m). The Design of this ungenerous, not to say invidious, Reflection on all those learned Men, who have appeared in Defence of the Jewish or Christian Revelation, is too bare-faced to want Explanation; and too plainly shews the singular Disregard he hath, and would, at any rate, inspire his Readers with, both for them, and their Writings. And if his vain Conceit of his Performance made him imagine, that it would

(l) Conf. Isa. xxxix. 14. & 1 Cor. i. & seq.

(m) Hume's Essay on Miracles, p. 204, & seq.

would deter others from entering the Lists against him, in Support of the same interesting Cause; it cannot but be extremely pleasing to all sincere Well-wishers to it, to see how quickly he was undeceived, and how many able Pens were ready to defend it by dint of fair and sound Reasoning, without the least Apprehension of being reckoned either *dangerous Friends*, or *disguised Enemies*, to it (n): Two Characters which are nowhere so justly applicable, as where so much Merit, and Force of Argument, is boasted, and so little urged to support it; or where so manifest a Distance, some would venture to call it Contrariety, appears between the sceptical Structure of the Premises, and the dogmatic Boldness of the Conclusion.

It is hardly possible to read the greater Part of that polite Author's Essays, without imagining yourself to be perusing some long and elaborate Commentary, or Exposition,

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(n) See, among others, Adams's Essay on Mr. Hume's Essay, where the latter is fully and clearly answered, Paragraph by Paragraph.

on one of the most instructive Lessons of the Book of *Wisdom* (A); in which the Weakness of human Understanding, the narrow Boundaries of our Knowledge, the Darkeness of our Conception, the Fallibility of our Reasonings, the Wildness of our Conclusions, and other human Defects, from which the greatest Philosophers of all Sects and Ages were not exempt, are exemplified in a most philosophical and pathetic Manner. The on-

(A) The Words of that excellent ancient Author, whose Work is, by the Greeks, justly stiled *Panarctos*, are as follow (1);

Verse 13. *For what Man is he who can know the Counsel of God, or know what the Lord's Will is?*

14. *For the Thoughts of mortal Man are fearful, and our Devices are but uncertain.*

15. *For the corruptible Body presseth down the Soul, and the earthly Tabernacle weigheth down the Mind, that misseth on many Things.*

16. *And hardly do we guess aright at the Things that are upon Earth; and with great Difficulty do we find out the Things that are at hand; but the Things that are in Heaven, who hath searched out?*

17. *And thy Counsel who hath known, except thou give him Wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?*

18. *For so were the Ways of them that lived on Earth reformed, and Men were taught by thee the Things that are pleasing unto thee, and were saved through Wisdom.*

(1) *Wisdom of Solomon*, ix. 13. *ad fin.*

ly Difference between the Text and Comment, is in the Choice of the most proper Remedy; the former directing us to seek it in that Wisdom which cometh from above, and flows from the sacred Fountain of Divine Revelation; the only sure and safe Criterion of Truth: The other, unwilling to go so far, on what he thinks a bootless Errand, being intirely satisfied in his own Mind, that every thing of that Kind, that is pretended to be derived from thence, is no other than mere Delusion or Forgery, imagines there may be a much nearer Way to be found to it: And tho' he hath sought for it in vain in all the Schools of Philosophy, both antient and modern; yet having, after much Difficulty and Study, happily stumbled upon one, which will better suit his Purpose; is no less industrious in recommending the Use of it to Mankind, as a most efficacious, *nay, an everlasting, Check to all Kinds of Bigotry, and superstitious Delusions*; and so safe a Criterion for every wise Man to regulate his Belief by, that the Benefit of it will, in all

Likelihood, be felt *as long as the World endures* (a). This new Criterion, this new Touchstone, is what he stiles Experience, or common Observation; which, tho' in most respects as old as our first Parents, yet may be, nevertheless, allowed a new Discovery, with respect to the unlimited Application he would have us make of it, to all Times, Places, Persons, and Cases: So that, according to him, whatever Facts, Doctrines, or other pretended Truths, fall in our Way, and will not abide this Test, may, and ought, by every wise Man, to be struck out of his Creed; but more especially all such as carry the Face or Pretence of a Miracle, on whatever Testimony founded, as being the most opposite to common Experience and Observation.

By what powerful Arguments he hath deavoured to establish the Certainty and Safety of this new Criterion, so as to venture, upon the Strength of it, not only to explode the

(a) *Essay on Miracles*, p. 174.

the Authority of the sacred Books, but to burlesque and ridicule all the Miracles recorded both in the Law and Gospel; how he makes it appear, that the Want of Experience or Observation of a Fact is equivalent to its being contrary to it; and consequently sufficient to outweigh all that Multitude and Variety of Testimonies, both from Friends and Foes, which are urged in Defence of their Reality and Evidence; lastly, what irrefragable Proofs he, or any of his Predecessors, have hitherto produced, not only against the Probability, but even the Possibility, of all Miracles; so as to dare to pronounce all those, upon which the *Jewish* and Christian Revelations are built, to be mere Delusions and Imposture; shall be fairly examined in the First, and some of the following Essays. And I was the more readily prevailed upon to make them public at this Juncture, not only as the Subjects they were written in Defence of, were some of those which had been most carped at, and ridiculed, by our modern Sceptics, and rank-

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ed in the Lump, by the Author last quoted, among the most absurd and fabulous Productions of those remote and barbarous Ages and People (*p*); but because I am satisfied, they have not hitherto, that I know of, been sufficiently examined, or so rationally accounted for, as I hope they will be found there. And if the Reader find something new and peculiar, in the Light I have given to those Miracles which *Moses* wrought in *Egypt*, in the first Essay, or by *Josbua*, in the Land of *Canaan*, in those that follow it, I doubt not but it will, upon due Examination, be found to be exactly conformable to the strict Tenour of the Text, as well as to the main End and Scope of the Divine Providence; considered, not as terminating solely in the Benefit and Prosperity of the *Israelitish* Nation, as our Opposers misrepresent it; but as a real Prelude of that universal System in favour of Mankind, which had been, in part, revealed to *Adam*, immediately after his Fall (*q*); and was to be conducted,

(*p*) *Essay on Miracles*, p. 205, & seq.

(*q*) *Genes.* iii. 15.

ducted, by gradual Steps, to its full Completion, by our Divine Redeemer, under the Light of his glorious Gospel. For if it can be once fairly proved, against all our Opposers, to be every way consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of the Supreme Being, to interpose his divine Power, in order to rectify the enormous Disorders that had been introduced into the moral World, particularly in Religion; then it will be no less evident, that no Period could be more seasonable, to lay the Foundation of such a Reformation, than this; when the civil Power, and the Avarice of the heathen Priests, had rendered the Distemper incurable by any other means, than by such a Series of Wonders: No Scene more proper to display them in than *Egypt*; where the most abominable Idolatry and Worship had its Birth, and had spread itself into all other Countries, far and near. Neither will any of the Miracles, which *Moses* wrought there, under the Divine Power and Direction, appear less wisely levelled against some one or other of
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their pretended Deities, or against some other Branch of their idolatrous Theology; and consequently every way conducive to the main Design of convincing that infatuated People, by the most rational means, of God's absolute Superintendency and Government over the whole Creation.

The extraordinary Adventure of *Balaam*, and the singular Circumstances that accompanied it, have been likewise the Subject of much Cavil and Ridicule among our Unbelievers, and of Doubt and Dissatisfaction among the far greater Part of Believers, both *Jews* and Christians; either for want of Leisure, or Capacity, to give it a due and serious Examination; many of them, even among the latter, looking upon the whole Transaction as scarce worth, or fit to bear, a Scrutiny. Yet I am willing to hope, that what I have said upon it will easily reconcile any impartial Reader to the most exceptionable Part of it, and make the Whole to appear altogether uniform, agreeable, and conducing

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to the same gracious System of the Divine Providence. But of all the Transactions recorded in the Old Testament, none have been objected so much against, or with so great Appearance of Reason, as those surprising swift Marches, and signal Victories, ascribed to *Joshua*, *Saul*, and other *Hebrew* Chiefs; and which, considering the plain and succinct Stile in which they are related by the sacred Penmen, are clogged with so many geographical and other Difficulties, as have appeared, to some of the ablest Commentators, altogether insurmountable. I have, in the following Essays, singled out two of the most remarkable Instances of that Kind; *viz.* that of *Joshua* over *Jabin*, King of *Hazor*, and his numberless Confederates; and the swift Conquest of Northern *Canaan*, that immediately followed it (*r*); and that of *Saul* over *Nahash*, King of the *Ammonites*, at the Siege of *Jabesh-Gilead* (*s*). This last, above all others, is related with so many Circumstances

(*r*) *Josh.* xi. *pass.*

(*s*) *1 Sam.* xi. *pass.*

cumstances which give it the Appearance of Impossibility, that most Critics and Commentators have been contented to let the Credibility of it rest on the sole Authority of the inspired Writer. And yet I dare flatter myself to have made it plainly appear, in the last of these Essays, that there wanted nothing but a competent Acquaintance with the excellent Laws, and martial Discipline, of the *Hebrews*, together with some Attention to the Geography of their Country, and the Situation of their respective Tribes, both with regard to each other, and to the heathen Nations round about them, to dispel all those seemingly unfurmountable Difficulties, and to demonstrate that whole Transaction to be every way as feasible and probable (though, in most respects, as great and noble, if not much more so), as any that is to be met with in sacred or profane History.

This last Piece, it is hoped, the Reader will not be displeased to see published in a different Form from the rest (*viz.* in that of a Sermon,

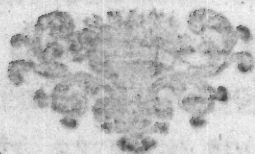
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Sermon, in which it was originally written by the same Lay Hand); when he comes to be acquainted, at the Conclusion, with the Occasion and Success of it. And thus much shall suffice for a Preface to these Essays; which, if they meet with a favourable Acceptance from the Public, may be hereafter followed by the Remainder of our epistolary Intercourse, on the like obscure and controverted Places of the Sacred Writ.



ESSAY

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ESSAY I.

LETTER I.

On the real Evidence of Miracles in general; and more particularly of those which were wrought in Confirmation of the Jewish and Christian Revelation.

Reverend Sir,



Am not a little concerned to hear, that your Lot is so unluckily fallen into a Parish where you are so frequently attacked by your sceptic Neighbours; who take an ungenerous Delight in pressing you upon those difficult

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Points

Points of Scripture, in which they know you to be least versed ; such as particularly the *Hebrew* and other Eastern Tongues; the *Jewish* Oeconomy, Antiquities, Laws, and Customs. And it is greatly to be wish'd, either that there were not so great a Number of our Clergy, who have, like you, been misled into a Neglect of so necessary a Branch of Learning, or that they would, as often as they fall under the like Difficulties, make use of the same Method you have condescended to take, of supplying that Defect, by appealing to some more proper Judge of every Point in Dispute, rather than to suffer the Authority of the sacred Historians to be impaired thro' your want of Ability, as you modestly word it, of defending them. And I no less applaud your Prudence in the Choice of a Layman, who will, in all Probability, be thought less exceptionable than a Clergyman, in a Controversy of this nature : But why you should single me out for the Task, when you might so easily have pitch'd upon one of much superior Ability, to answer the End, I can only ascribe to that partial Satisfaction you lately expressed, in reading some of my former Observations on several obscure and
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controverted Points of the Old Testament. I shall therefore the more readily accept of your Offer, as it will afford me an Opportunity of communicating to you, and your Neighbours, some more of the same kind, which I have had occasion to make during my long Recess from the World; and which, in all Likelihood, must otherwise have lain neglected and useless by me. And I own myself highly obliged to you, for having engaged yourself to conceal my Name, unless permitted by me to do otherwise; which I cannot by any means consent to, upon several Considerations I need not trouble you and them with; one of which will, however, easily occur to you, that it is too obscure, and too little known, to add any Weight to what I shall transmit to you. On its own Merit let it stand or fall. One thing you may indeed acquaint them with, because it may, in all Probability, make a favourable Impression on them; *viz.* That the Writer is a Layman, who, tho' neither designed for, nor ever intending to enter into Holy Orders, hath yet chosen to dedicate the greater part of his latter Life to this kind of Study; but hath still, for some not unworthy Reasons,

sons, carefully concealed his Name; altho' some of his Productions have met with a good Reception from the Public. And as you are sufficiently apprised, that this is my case, so it can hardly fail of meeting with a ready Belief from a Person of your singular Integrity. Thus much in Answer to the former Part of your Letter.

As to the Objections and Difficulties raised by them against several miraculous and other historical Facts, recorded in the Old Testament (*a*), as I have long ago had occasion to examine them at my leisure Hours, so I doubt not to convince them in the subsequent Essays, that they chiefly arise either from their not being sufficiently acquainted with, or their not having given sufficient Attention to, the peculiar Genius of the *Hebrew* Idiom, the Laws, Discipline, and Customs, of the *Jews*, and the uniform and general Design of Providence towards them; and more particularly to a Misapprehension of their being calculated solely in favour of that Nation; whereas, in fact, they were no less designed

(*a*) These are particularly mentioned in the Title-page and Preface.

designed and fitted for the Benefit of the rest of the heathen World. So that if your sceptic Neighbours are the Persons of Sense and Candour you represent them, I flatter myself I shall find no great Difficulty in removing all that Heap of Doubts and Difficulties which they have thrown in your way, with respect to the Facts in question; and, at the same time, make it appear to their Satisfaction, that this admirable and long Series of Miracles which were wrought both in *Egypt*, and in the Land of *Canaan*, were so far from being calculated in favour of the *Jewish* Nation only, that they are no less than a gradual and uniform Sequel of that divine Scheme, which had been laid ever since the Creation, for the Benefit of all Mankind, and was to be fully completed in the Person of the *Messiah*, when the Fulness of the Time was come.

In the mean while, as you inform me, that some of your Antagonists are great Admirers of the noble Author of the *Characteristics*, of *Collins*, *Tindal*, the late Writer of the *Moral Philosopher*, and other professed Opposers of Divine Revelation, and

of the Miracles on which the *Jewish* and *Christian* Religion are built, it will be highly requisite, before I proceed farther, to take a short Examen of the Arguments by which those Authors pretend to prove, not only the Incredibility, but likewise the Impossibility, of all Miracles in general, as well as of those which are urged in Confirmation of the Law and Gospel. Were a mere Stranger to guess at the Merit of the *Christian* Revelation, by the indefatigable Pains which these pretended Well-wishers to Mankind, and public Society, have taken to overthrow it, he must of course conclude it to be one of the worst, and the most dangerous, instead of the most beneficial and comfortable Systems of Religion in the World. And if we were to measure the Success of their Labour, either by the Number of their Admirers, or by the victorious Applauses they assume to themselves, or have received from them, we could not hardly suppose any thing but that they had long since gained their Point, and silenced all Opposers, by the most irrefragable Arguments, and clearest Demonstration (b). And yet we plainly

(b) *De his vid. int. al. Spinos. Leibnit. Dissert. de Fid.*

On MIRACLES.

plainly see, that as on the one hand they have never dared yet openly to impugn the excellent Morality of its Precepts, so neither have they been able, on the other, to undermine its Foundation, by all the Variety of Engines they have set on work for that purpose. They have all, indeed, made strong Efforts to cry down the Validity, Truth, Probability, and some of them even Possibility, of those numberless Miracles on which its Evidence is chiefly founded: They have left no Art untried, to expose them as contrary to Reason, and the Experience of Mankind, and what they know of the stated Laws and Course of Nature: They have represented them as inconsistent with the Immutability of the Supreme Being, and as insufficient Evidences of the Doctrines they are urged in Proof of. Some of them have endeavour'd to expose the Law, and the Gospel, as unnecessary and impertinent Revelations; *Mens natural Faculties being able to teach them the most excellent Morals, to furnish them with the most effectual Incentives to*

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Fid. & Ration. Collins. Tindal. Moral Philosopher. Considerations on the Resurrection, against The Trial of the Witnesses, & al.

the Observation of them, and to inspire them with the truest Notions of the Divine Nature, and a well grounded Belief of a Supreme Being, and his Providence: Which, if true, overturns at once the Necessity of a Revelation, and of the Miracles urged in Proof of it. Others again as positively affirm, that such Revelations were not only needless, but that the admitting of any such, implies some extraordinary Defect in the moral World, which requires a Divine Interposition to amend it: Whereas all God's Works, being the Result of infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, can never be supposed to stand in need of any Amendment, much less of a Divine Interposition to rectify them. Lastly, they affirm, with the same Assurance, that if such an Interposition of the Divine Power was ever requisite upon that, or any other Occasion, it must have been always, and ever continue to be so. If Miracles, therefore, were thought necessary or expedient at any time, they must be so at all times; because, say they, whoever supposes God to have wrought them in one Generation, and not in another, must of course

course look upon him as a partial Being (c). This is the Sum and Substance of all their Arguments against the Reality, Evidence, and Possibility, of Miracles: In consequence of which, they have made no Scruple to condemn them all in the Lump, as Delusions and vile Impositions upon Mankind; and the Records of them, be their Character what it will in other respects, as Dealers in Forgeries and Monstrosities, and unworthy any Credit or Regard (d).

From this short Scantling I have given of the Premises and Conclusion, you, and your sceptic Neighbours, may clearly see what Pains those Authors have taken to eradicate, as far as possible, the very Notion of a Divine Revelation, founded on Miracles, out of the World. And it was natural for them to prefer that expeditious Way to any other: And since they could not stand against the Shafts that galled them from that Battery, to endeavour, by any means, to blow it up. And if their sanguine Hopes have hitherto failed of Success, the World will at least say
thus

(c) *Consider. ubi sup.* p. 98. Edit. 3. p. 82.

(d) *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 179, & seq.

thus much in Justice to them, that their Disappointment is owing to some other Cause, than to the want of Zeal, or hard struggling for it, on their Part : Whilst those who reflect more justly upon it, will, probably, be reminded of *Christ's* infallible Promise to his Church (e), that he would protect it to the End of Time, and against much more powerful and dangerous Attempts than any of these Gentlemen can make against it. But this more properly belonging to your Province, I shall leave to you to take notice of, and urge against your Opponents, as occasion offers. And as I doubt not but you are by this time thoroughly acquainted with those excellent Authors, who have written in Defence of the *Jewish* and *Christian* Revelation (f), it will not be improper to observe to them, how short those of the opposite Side are from having completed their Task, were even their Arguments
against

(e) *Matth.* xvi. 18.

(f) I shall here insert some of the principal of them, for the sake of the younger Sort of Readers. See *Gratius*, and *Labadie de Verit.* *Limborch's Theolog.* & *Amica Collat. cum erudito Judao.* *Lesley's Short Method with the Deists.* *Bentley's Boyle's Lectures*, and *Philo-Luther.* *Lipsiens.* *Dean B.'s Alciphron*, *Dr. Sam. Clark, Saurin, Calmet, & al.* on the most difficult Places in the Old Testament.

against Revelation more solidly founded, and their Inferences more fairly drawn, than they will be found, upon closer Examination, to be: For, even in such case, the Merit of the Controversy, at the best, will be still left in Suspense, until they have fully consulted all that hath been urged in Defence of it; and all that a Reader of a moderate Capacity could conclude, after a careful Perusal of both Sides, would be only this, that it was a Point about which much might, and had been urged *pro* and *con.*; but on which Side to fix, he was still at a Loss. 'Tis true, one thing must greatly help to determine him in favour of our Side, who are the Defendants in Possession; *viz.* our Readiness, at all times, to enter the List with them on the fairest Terms, and to give their Arguments a candid Hearing, as well as the most solid and pertinent Answers; whilst they, without paying the least Regard to them, take all Opportunities they can, to appear in the Field with the same Air of Triumph, tho' so often repulsed, and with the same old weather-beaten Invalids, kept up, it seems, in Reserve, upon every fresh Occasion, to make a short-liv'd Parade in some new modish Dress, and

and be laid up again till farther Orders. It would be no difficult Matter to discover the Grounds of these so frequent and indecent Insults on a Revelation that hath the Seal of Heaven for its Credentials; the most excellent and exalted Morality for its Voucher; the Testimony of all Antiquity, Foes as well as Friends, for its Evidence; the most considerable Men of all Ages for Learning, Judgment, and Integrity, for its Defenders; and the Legislative Power for its Support. But I shall leave that to you, and others, to infer from the plain Tendency and Spirit of their Writings, and the Nature of the Religion which they would substitute in its stead. There you'll likewise see, with Ease, the true Motive of their singular Contempt for the Clergy, especially of those who have written most clearly and powerfully in Defence of Christianity, or most effectually detected and exploded the Sophistry and Fal-lacy of their Arguments against its Evidence from Miracles. This last is indeed an Af-front, or Injury, perhaps, in their Sense, they will not easily forgive them; as it hath cast no small Reflection on their Integrity, as well as Judgment; and, by that means,
prevented

prevented their favourite Scheme from going so swimmingly on, or meeting with so general an Approbation, as they seemed to expect (g). It is not unlikely neither, that your sceptic Neighbours, and others of their Admirers and Disciples, may flatter themselves with the Hopes of better Days, and an happier World, should these Demagogues prove so successful as to become the only Instructors and Reformers of it; and, by procuring their so much boasted System of natural Religion to be adopted instead of the Christian, which is now establish'd, set human Reason at once free from the Oppression of mysterious Creeds, and their Fellow-subjects from the Dominion of Priestcraft, and other religious Impositions: So that every one might live peaceably under his own Vine, and under his own Fig-tree: And I may add, in his own Way, without Fear or Danger of Coercion, or other Disturbance from those hot Zealots for Revelation. But were that more likely to be ever the case than it is, I can see but little Reason to expect,

(g) See *Rights of the Christian Church defended. Christianity as old as the Creation. Independent Whig. Moral Philosopher, & al. pass.*

pect, that we of the Laity should meet with better Quarter, by becoming the Disciples and Catechumens of these new Guides, than we enjoy under our present ones ; or that Men that betray so much Subtilty and Sophistry in their Reasonings, and shew themselves, in the highest Degree, either sceptical or dogmatical, as best suits with their Purpose, could much better agree in any one System of Morality or Religion than ours do, or indulge their Disciples in a greater Freedom of thinking and acting than these do their Flocks. Hitherto they have been only endeavouring to undermine and pull down an old Structure they do not like : But if we may guess from thence, how they will act when they come to build their new one, it is much to be feared, that, let them split themselves into ever so many Systems about it, they will agree in this one Canon, to turn Scepticism over to their Hearers, and to allow of none to act the Dogmatists but those that sit in the Chair. But, not to create to ourselves needless Fears from their ill-grounded Hopes, let us now take a short Survey of those pretended irrefragable Arguments they have hitherto urged against the Credibility and Possibility of

of Miracles; and on the Strength of which one of their latest Writers hath made no Difficulty to affirm they may, and ought to be, rejected, as Delusions and Forgeries, merely on account of their being Miracles, let the Authority of the Recorder, or Evidence of the Fact, be what they will; because, according to him, the Evidence of the Testimony must naturally rise or fall, according as the Fact related is more or less agreeable to our common Experience and Observation: The Consequence of which must be, That *where the Fact attested hath seldom fallen under Observation, there is a Contest of two opposite Experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its Force goes (b).* This strange Way of Reasoning, which seems to imply, that *want of Observation, and contrary to Observation, are the same Thing,* hath been already so clearly confuted by a learned Author (i), that it were superfluous to add any-thing to it: Only I cannot but observe, that it is much the same with that which a witty French Writer (k) supposes

Roses

(b) *Hume's Essay on Miracles*, p. 179.

(i) *Adams's Essay on Miracles*, p. 10. & seq.

(k) *Font. World in the Moon*.

Roses would be apt to make, concerning their Gardener, and conclude him to be some eternal and unchangeable Being, because they had never observed any Alteration in him, either with respect to Age, Dress, &c. Now, if I may be permitted to carry the Allusion a little farther, Let us suppose, that they had some authentic Records, that this same Gardener had, many Generations before, made a much finer Appearance for some time, that is, in his *Sunday's* Dress; or that in some Corner of the Rose-bush there had been kept a constant Tradition, and very authentic Monuments and Records, that the same Gardener, in some Ages still more remote, had been so kind to the whole Shrub, as to cut down a Tree which greatly incommoded it by its Shade, and frequent dropping of Rain; or that he had planted a very convenient and comfortable Fence to shelter them against the cutting North-winds. In this case, if that Author reasons justly, it is plain, that all these Facts must be rejected as fabulous, or mere Forgeries, because they could not find, either by Observation, or Experience, that they had been ever incommoded by any such Tree on the one Side, or had ever wanted such

such a Shelter on the other, or that ever the Gardener had been seen in any but one and the same Dress.

But is there no Disparity between the Facts recorded of the Gardener, and those which the Sacred Writers ascribe to the Supreme Being? Yes, doubtless, a vast one: But as the Want of Observation could be no sufficient Argument against the Authenticity of the Facts in one Case, so neither can it be against that of the other, unless either of them can be demonstrated to be above the Power of their respective Agents, or to have implied a palpable Contradiction. An hard Point this, one would think, to prove, with respect to the Deity: Let us therefore see now how they have succeeded in their Attempt to do it. But here you will, I doubt not, easily excuse me, if, for Brevity and Clearness sake, as well as to avoid troubling you with a Multitude of Quotations, I choose to link the Sum and Substance of all their Objections and Reasonings, together with my Answer to them, in one Chain; and to contract both in one short View, rather than as they lie scattered in the Works of the Writers on both

Sides of the Controversy. And you will do me the Justice to think, that as I would not charge them with any thing but what is expressly found in their Writings, much less would I omit any thing they have said on this important Head, that carries any Weight with it: For tho' your Antagonists at *P.*— may not perhaps carry their Opposition so far as the Authors I am going to examine; in which case they can easily disculpate themselves from it to you; yet would it by no means excuse my omitting any material thing that hath been urged by others on so momentous a Point.

First, then, as to that old and trite Objection against Miracles, that they are no proper Proofs of any Doctrine, I have already shewn some Instances in which they really are; and that the Raising of the Dead is as full and proper Evidence of the Doctrine of the Resurrection, as any that could be possibly given, or reasonably required (*l*). Again, the miraculous Cures wrought on the Blind, Lame, Lepers, Lunatics, Paralytics, and other Diseases, were no less proper, as well as pregnant

(*l*) See the Preface.

nant Proofs both of the universal Depravity of Mankind, and of the Guilt incur'd by it, when the same miraculous Power that delivered them from the dire Effects of the former, pronounced them absolved from the latter (m). What greater Proof could any one require to convince him, that his Guilt or Sin was really remitted to him with respect to the Penalty or Punishment of it in the next Life, than such a miraculous Deliverance from that only Part of it which was the Consequence of it in this? With respect to the monstrous Idolatry, and abominable Superstitions, which had over-run the greatest Part of the heathen World, at the time when *Moses* made his second Appearance in *Egypt*, could any thing be more proper or pertinent to convince that Nation of the Absurdity and Impiety of their worshiping, and putting any Confidence in, the false Deities of their own creating, or of the God of *Israel* being the Supreme Governor and Disposer of all sublunary things, than that long and wonderful Contest, which he condescended to enter into with them; wherein every Miracle wrought under his Direction and Au-

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spices,

(m) *Matth.* ix. 2, & seq.

spices, by his Servant, was so exactly levelled against some one or other of their pretended Deities, and every other Branch of their superstitious Worship, as will be more fully shewn in the next Essay? And if *Egypt* was at that time the chief Seat of Learning, from which every Branch of it, together with that vast Variety of Extravagancies which related to their Worship, flowed into most other Countries about it, far and near; if their Priests and Doctors were allowed to excel all others, not only in the Knowledge of their profound and mystic Theology, but in their Skill in Astronomy, Astrology, Natural Philosophy, Magic, Divination, and other pretended occult Arts and Sciences; where could there be a more proper Scene for this Display of his supreme and irresistible Power, than that? What Means more likely to convince, not only *Pharaoh*, and his Subjects, but all other Nations which had received their false Theology from thence, of the Vanity and Impotency of their imaginary Deities, than the constant Defeat which was given to them at every new Tryal? What Time more proper than this for it, when the Infection was grown so universal, and become incurable by any other

other Means, by its reigning under the Presence of a Divine Sanction, whilst those who alone had the Power of suppressing, made it their Interest and Glory to support and propagate it? Lastly, What Occasion more worthy of the Divine Interposition, than the reducing such a Number of Nations from the most destructive and abominable Errors in Faith and Practice, to such a Sense of his unerring Providence, such an Obedience to his Will, and such pure and undefiled Worship of him, as could alone intitle them to his Favour and Blessings in this, and the next Life?

Hence then we may safely conclude, that Miracles were so far from being such improper Evidences of God's gracious Design of reclaiming a degenerate World from that Multitude of Errors and Enormities, into which it was irretrievably immersed, that they appear to have been the most effectual, if not the only Means, that could bring about so desirable a Change; as they were most apt to awaken the Attention of Mankind; appealed to their rational Faculties, without offering any Violence to their Freedom;

dom; and gave them the strongest Assurances of his over-ruling Providence over the whole Creation; and, what still more nearly concerned them to know, over all those imaginary Deities, whether the Luminaries, Planets, Stars, Elements, or any other mistaken Object of their Worship and Confidence. Hence also we may judge, how worthy of the Divine Goodness and Justice such a miraculous Interposition ought to appear to every serious Thinker, that is, not as merely calculated in Favour of the poor and despicable Nation of the *Jews*, as our Opposers falsely suggest, but for the Benefit, both present and future, of the heathen World; and ultimately, as a Part or Prelude to the grand System of the Redemption of Mankind (n).

Against all this, how reasonable soever, they have, as I observed to you a little higher, levelled a new Set of Arguments, which, in their Judgment, amount to no less

(n) See Grot. de Verit. Lib. I. Comm. in Exod. L'Abadie Verit. de la Religion Judaïque. Bate's Harmony of the Divine Attributes. Bray's Covenant. Hammond, and other Commentators on Exod. Sam. Clark's Lectures, & al.

less than so many Demonstrations, not only against the *Credibility*, but the *Possibility of all Miracles*, how firmly soever attested, and on what Occasion soever pretended to have been wrought; how justly, we shall now examine.

First, then, with regard to the universal Disaster, which we lately observed had overrun the moral World, and stood in need of nothing less than the divine Interposition to rectify, they peremptorily object, *That both the material and moral World, being alike the Production of infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, cannot be otherwise than perfect, each in their Kind; and consequently out of all Possibility of ever standing in Need of any such Interposition to amend it.* This is one of their fundamental Axioms; which whosoever can admit, without any farther Proof (for none they have, or can give of it), must of course give up the Cause of Miracles as absurd, and utterly exploded. What they affirm of the material World being less pertinent to our present Controversy, I shall content myself with reminding them, that a much greater Natural Philosopher, than they

can produce out of their Class, made no Scruple to declare himself of a contrary Opinion; viz. *That the Frame of it would, in Course of Time, require the same divine Hand to re-touch and refit it*, that had at first created it (o). With respect to the moral World, it is no less certain, that two as great Moral Philosophers, as ever Antiquity, or the World, could boast, were so far from dreaming any thing like its having been created in such pretended Perfection, as to be above all Possibility of ever wanting the Divine Interposition to reform it, that one of them, *Socrates* (p), *thought it highly reasonable to hope, that God in time would send some proper Messenger from Heaven, to instruct Mankind in the great Duties of Religion and Morality*. The other, the celebrated *Confucius*, who flourished in *China* above a Century earlier than that of *Athens*; that is, about 530 Years before the Christian Æra; used to comfort himself, and his Disciples, under the then reigning Degeneracy, with a prevailing Tradition they had among them, that the SAINT, or HOLY-ONE, so he stiled the extraordinary Person, who

(o) *Sir Isaac Newton's Optics*, p. 346. last Edit.

(p) *Vid Plut. in Alcibiad. ad fin.*

who was expected to work a signal Reformation in the World, would, in time, appear in the *West* (q); meaning, doubtless, *Christ*, the promised *Messiah*, and Divine Lawgiver (A).

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(q) *Martini. Hist. Sinens. p. 413. Du Halde in vit. Confuc. & alib.*

(A) This Notion of an holy Lawgiver, or Reformer, together with his Character of a peaceable Prince, and the very Year of his coming into the World, if we may believe the *Chinese* Missionaries, was so well known, and strongly believed, not only in *Confucius's* Time, but for several Ages after him; that on the very Year in which it was foretold he should be born, which was exactly that of *Christ's* Birth, the then reigning Monarch, a Prince otherwise of no great Character, is recorded to have changed his Name of *Ngay*, which signified a Conqueror, into that of *Ping*, or *Peaceable*, in Memory of that remarkable Event (1).

How they came by this Tradition, or could be so

exact as to the Year, we are not told; but it is not unlikely, that the *Chinese* received it from *Noah*, or some of his immediate Descendants, as they were settled in those remote Parts some few Ages after the Flood: And as to their being exact, with respect to the very Year, it is probable, that they kept their Records more carefully, as living separate from other Nations, who were continually at War with each other, whilst they enjoyed a constant Peace among themselves, and Freedom from Invaders without: So that the Tradition being, in all Probability, the same which was likewise preserved in the Family of *Shem*, and descended from thence to the *Israelites*, importing, that the *Messiah*,

(1) *Martin Du Halde, & al. ub. sup.*

We may indeed safely leave it to them, to make out this pretended Impossibility of the World's ever wanting to be amended, against the known Sentiment of the rest of the World, and the constant Experience of all Ages and Nations; and to shew in what Sense such a Divine Revelation, as that we are defending, can be said to amend God's original Work, except that in which a good Education, or Instruction, is known to do; for what doth a Divine Revelation else, than afford Mankind a clearer and more certain Knowledge of his Divine Nature and Attributes, than bare unassisted Reason could do, in order to render us more conformable to his Will, and to the Ends for which he made us? We may therefore pronounce the moral World perfect, when every Part of it is endowed with Faculties answerable to those Ends. And it is in this very Sense, that the wise Man (r) tells us God made

(r) *Ecclef. viii. 29.*

or promised Seed, should appear at the Close of the Fourth, or Beginning of the Fifth Millenary, *Confucius* might more easily determine the precise Time from their Records, with which he

was perfectly acquainted; But as to the precise Coincidence of the Year with that of *Christ's* Birth, it wholly depends on the Credit of the Jesuits above-mentioned.

made Man perfect, or upright; yet adds, that they sought out many Inventions, or, as the Original imports, vain Imaginations. He was endowed with sufficient Faculties to know what is right or wrong, and a free Power over his own Actions; that is, of making a good or bad Use of those Faculties; without which he would have been only a mere Piece of Machinery, instead of rational free Agent; and consequently incapable of Virtue or Vice, of Reward or Punishment. But as this doth not exclude, but rather enforces, the Necessity of Tutors to instruct and direct, and Monitors to encourage or deter, to reprove or reclaim Individuals, so much more will it do so with respect to the whole moral World. And since the Experience of every Age and Nation shews it to be in a continual Fluctuation, one while making vast Advances and Improvements in Virtue and Knowledge, and, by-and-by, sunk into the grossest Ignorance and Immorality, Superstition and Idolatry; if such has been the State of the moral World, that the far greater Part of it hath preferred Falshood to Truth, Vice to Virtue, Superstition to a pure Worship, with what Face can these Pretenders to Reasoning and

and Philosophy affirm it out of all Possibility of wanting any Amendment? They may indeed pronounce those Disorders to be incurable; and so they do, in fact, by excluding the only Means that can possibly rectify them. But what Reason can they give us, the Disease being thus far above all human Remedy, to believe the Divine Goodness too unconcerned to interpose, in our behalf, and furnish us with a more suitable, powerful, and effectual one; viz. a more perfect Revelation of himself, and a System of Morality more suitable to his Divine Will? But here they tell us again, that we assume too much, when we pronounce the disastrous State of Mankind to be beyond all human Power to rectify, seeing *the Faculties with which he hath endowed Mankind are abundantly sufficient to recover Mankind from any Miscarriage, and to furnish them with such a System of Religion and Morality, and such a competent Nation of God, and his Providence, as will answer all the Ends of such a supposed Revelation.* This they positively affirm; and tho' none of them hath hitherto dared, as they have in other Cases, to appeal to common Experience and Observation for the Truth of so bold

bold an Assumption, they being point-blank against it; a small Retrospection on the brightest Ages of the most polite antient Nations, the *Egyptians, Chaldeans, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, &c.* will soon convince us how few there were amongst their wise and learned Men, that had any true Notion either of the Deity, or of Religion and Morality; how fewer still, those who had either Credit, or Courage, to stem the Current of Superstition and Degeneracy, in Comparison of those who suffered themselves to be hurried away with it; to say nothing of the small, if not rather ill Success, of such an Opposition against such powerful Supporters as the Civil Power, the Priesthood, and an headstrong Populace. Our Antagonists therefore, being conscious how little able that vain Assertion was to stand against two such powerful Witnesses, have thought it more expedient to endeavour to prop it up by some far-fetch'd Arguments, which, how inconclusive soever, might at least bear the specious Face of Reasoning. And first, they tell us, that *such a miraculous Revelation is inconsistent with God's Immutability, one of his most essential Attributes;* that is, according to their Logic, if God is
immutable

immutable in his Nature, he must be likewise so in his Actions. Wild Conclusion this! and of no Force, unless they can also prove all his Creatures to be as unchangeable as himself, than which nothing is more contrary to all Observation and Experience, nor more absurd and unreasonable to suppose, and much more so with respect to the moral World: For if the Experience of all Ages shews it to have been in a constant Fluctuation; if whole Nations appear to have sunk from a good Pitch of Learning, to the lowest Dregs of Ignorance; from the truest and sublimest Notions of the Supreme Being, and of the pure Worship that is due to him, to the basest Degrees of Idolatry and Superstition; and from the noblest Sentiments of Virtue and Morality, to the most shameful Degeneracy and Corruption, both in Theory and Practice; what Reason can there be to suppose, much less to affirm so peremptorily, as our Opposers do, that a *Divine Interposition must necessarily be contrary to his Immutability*? Is it not rather more just to infer, that the very Immutability of his Nature and Counsels must incline, I might say, oblige him to alter his Measures with his Creatures,

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as often as he sees them deviate from, or go contrary to them, or abase those Faculties, and that Freedom of Choice, with which he had endowed them, to Purposes quite opposite to the Ends for which he had created them? Can a Clock-maker be said to change his Mind or Design, when he goes about mending what is amiss in a Clock; or a Physician, when the Irregularity of his Patient obliges him to alter his Prescriptions, and Method of treating him, in order to his Recovery? Much more absurd, if not impious, will it be, to infer a Mutability in the Supreme and All-wise Being, who, foreknowing from all Eternity all the possible Exigencies of his moral World, and the ill Use Men would make of those Faculties, and the Liberty, with which he had endowed them, must necessarily be thought to have decreed likewise, in his eternal Counsel, a proper Supply for every Want, and Remedy for every Disorder: So that every such extraordinary Interposition, as we are contending for, that is, where the Subject is worthy of it, is so far from implying any thing like a Mutability in the God-head, as our Opposers would infer, that it is in Reality no other than an Effect of his
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eternal and unalterable Decrees. I dare venture to appeal to every considering Man, whether Immutability, in this Sense, is not more truly, and every way, worthy of the Divine Nature, than that which our Opposers attribute to him, and which represents the whole Creation as a mere large Piece of compound Mechanism; which, having been once set in Motion by its Maker, is left to go on its own Way, without any farther Care or Regard from him, notwithstanding that great Variety of Disorders and Irregularities which is seen and felt in our moral Part of it?

But here, again, we are strangely stopped on the sudden, and are boldly arraigned, as entertaining too high Notions of the Divine Nature and Attributes; and all our Reasonings, from the Effects to the Cause, and ascribing those Perfections to the latter, in an infinite Degree, which we observe in the former, is, it seems, all false Logic: And whatever Degrees of Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, Power, &c. we ascribe to the Creator, *beyond what hath immediately fallen under our Observation on the Works of Nature, being all together unsupported by any Reason or*
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Argument, can never be admitted, but as mere Conjecture and Hypothesis (s). So that, according to this Author's Reasoning (which is, for Form's sake, put into the Mouth of an Epicurean Philosopher, supposed to defend his Doctrine before an Athenian Senate), as many as have ascribed any higher, or any other kind of Attributes or Perfections, to the Deity, than actually appear to have been exerted to the full, in his Works, have been guilty of Flattery and Panegyric, rather than Masters of just Reasoning and Philosophy; which can never be able to carry us beyond the usual Course of Experience, or give us different Measures of Conduct and Behaviour from those which are furnished by Reflection on common Life (t).

Whence we are taught these two special Lessons; viz. First, to take care, for the future, how we launch out in the Praises of the Supreme Creator, at that extraordinary rate the greatest Divines, and Moral Philosophers, have hitherto done, seeing the Notion of his infinite Wisdom, Power, Justice, &c. is no better than absurd Nonsense, an abso-

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(s) *Hume Essay*, xi. p. 228.

(t) *Ibid.* p. 230.

lute Contradiction to Experience and Reason; the one plainly shewing, that he never did, and the other, that it is impossible for him ever to exert any of his Perfections or Attributes, were they ever so truly infinite, in any such Degree as we may safely pronounce to be such, from any effectual Appearance, or Impression, they can make upon a finite Mind: The other Lesson we may learn from it is, not to suffer ourselves to be any more imposed upon, by any Pretence, how specious soever, that he ever did, or ever will, interpose his Power, or furnish us with any new Means to amend his moral World; since, if our Author's Logic is good, we have no Reason or Argument to convince us, that, bad or corrupt as it may appear to us, it is not in as good and perfect Condition as he could, or knew how to, make it; and the contrary Supposition, that he might, if he would, is at best but mere *Conjecture and Hypothesis*.

I shall readily leave it to him to make the most of all this bold assuming Stuff against the clearest and most convincing Reasonings of those great Divines, and learned Philosophers, who have hitherto argued in Defence of

of God's infinite Perfection. If such dogmatical Assertions as his may pass for Demonstrations with any Set of Men, not only the Notion of the divine Attributes, but that of the divine Nature, may be in some Danger of dwindling into a mere imaginary Shadow, in their Estimation: And we may plainly see, by the Topics they have hitherto made use of, to explode the bare Possibility of its interposing in human Affairs, upon any Account or Exigence whatsoever, how much they have already ventured to sink it below the Mark to which most other Schools, except their own, had so universally raised it.

But since this Author not only makes Experience and Observation the sole Touchstone by which we may judge of the Truth of any historical Facts, but seems to engross the sole Property and Evidence to his own Side, whilst he absolutely excludes ours from challenging any Benefit from it, merely because those we challenge in Defence of the divine Revelation are of a miraculous Kind, it will not be improper here to examine which of the Two hath the better Claim to it, even according to his way of Reasoning:

For if that Experience may be most safely depended upon, which is founded upon the best Testimony, it is plain, that ours hath produced the amplest, the most positive, unquestionable, and universal, from Friends and Foes, and been confirmed by other authentic Monuments, in Proof of the Miracles recorded in our sacred Books (*u*); whereas all the pretended Experience he objects against them, being of the negative Kind, and implying no more than a Want of Experience and Observation, and not a Contrariety to it, can never be allowed to outweigh the Evidence of a single well-attested Testimony, much less of such a Number and Variety of them as we allege against him. This he could not but be sensible of; and that, as he could not object any thing against the Sufficiency of them, either on account of their Paucity, or of the Character of the Witnesses, but what had been fully answered long ago, and by many able Pens, he must likewise think, that his confining his negative Experience to such Periods of Time, in which no such divine

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(*u*) *Vid. Grotius, & L'Abadie de Verit. Lesley's Short Method, & al. sup. citat. vid. & Un. Hist. Octavo, vol. 3. p. 390, & seq. sub not. p. & alib. pass.*

Interpositions were become unnecessary, and, consequently, could not fall under our Observation, is but a weak Argument against the Credibility of their having been displayed in former ones; when the Exigencies of the moral World did more immediately require them, and the Occasion of them was altogether worthy of them. And when could there be a more worthy one, than when Mankind were not only sunk into the most dishonourable Notions of the Deity, and the most abominable Rites in his Worship; but had even degenerated so far, as to shelter them under the Sanction of his Authority and Institution, barring up by that means, all possible Avenues against Conviction, and rendering the Distemper incurable by any other Means, but that of a new Revelation of himself, and his divine Will? If in such a Case we have sufficient Testimony, that the divine Providence interposed, and, by a long Series of Miracles the most apposite, strove to convince the *Egyptians*, who were the first Broachers and Propagators of that detestable Theology and Worship, of the Vanity of their false Deities, the Impiety of their religious Rites, and of his alone and absolute

Superintendency over all his Creatures (and our Author is not above supposing, that *the Testimony for those Miracles, considered apart, and in itself, may amount to a full Proof*), I would gladly know of what Evidence his negative Experience of latter Ages, when no such Exigence called for them, can be, against that of the former ones, when there was such a visible Necessity for them? Or how the want of Observation in the former can invalidate the Testimony which we have of their having been so frequent, and so signal, in the latter? At this rate of Reasoning, an Inhabitant of *Lower Egypt* must never believe, that *Palestine*, and other Countries, enjoy the Benefit of the former and latter Rain, let ever so many credible Eye-witnesses assure him of it; because such a Blessing is seldom or never observed in his own: And, for the same wise Reason, those that live within the Tropics, ought not, on any Account, to believe that there is either Snow or Ice without, because there is no such Thing to be seen within them: And one-half of the Moon's Globe must not believe, that our Earth is a Planet to it, because it can never be observed

served by those of that Side, by reason of its being constantly turned from us.

But here it may be asked, How doth all this affect our Author's Argument, drawn from Non-experience, and Non-observation, against Testimony? which is not here levelled against a few rare Phænomena of Nature, but against Miracles, which are a plain Deviation from, or (as he pleases to stile them) a Violation of, the Laws of Nature? Is not this single Consideration sufficient to discredit it, and explode the bare Possibility of them, against any Testimony whatever, *tho', considered apart, and in itself, amounting to a full Proof?* I grant that the Charge of Violation of Nature's Laws, were Miracles really such, as is here so boldly affirmed, carries an Absurdity sufficient to discourage any thinking Person from admitting the bare Possibility of it, let who will be Violator of them, whether the Supreme Author of those Laws, or any other subordinate Power. But here the Absurdity lies, in the Supposition of either being possibly chargeable with it; for in what Sense can the former be possibly taxed with violating his own Laws, whenever he sees fit, for Motives

worthy of himself, to suspend or dispense with them? Or how can the latter, who only act as Instruments under him, and by his sole Direction and Power? That Nature would act constantly, and uniformly, to the Laws that were first impressed upon it by the Supreme Being, is out of all Question; but what less, than being of his own eternal Council, or having it revealed to him, can embolden any Creature to affirm, or even imagine, that he divested himself of all Power of ever suspending, or dispensing with them, upon any Occasion whatsoever? much less, that such a Suspension of, or dispensing with, was a Violation of them; especially as we still see the same Laws constantly observed in every Instance, but where the Exigencies of the moral World rendered such a casual Interposition necessary or expedient: In which case in cannot be deemed any other than an Effect of his divine Wisdom and Prescience, and a Part of his eternal Decrees, in consequence to it, as I observed a little higher to you.

Here, again, therefore, the Author last-quoted hath greatly overshot himself in making

ing what he calls Experience, or Observation, the common Standard of the Laws of Nature (*w*), which, were it ever so truly such, as in many Cases it is plain it is not, yet hath nothing to do with Miracles; the very Notion of which supposes a Deviation from those Laws; the Impossibility of which can never be, with any Justice, pleaded against Testimony, until it hath been fully demonstrated: But that is what our Opposers could never yet do, nor, I may add, ever will: For where is the Absurdity or Impossibility of the Supreme Lawgiver's suspending his own Laws, or even of his decreeing, in his eternal Counsel, the Dispensing with, or Suspension of them, for some wise Ends, towards his rational Creatures? that is, either to convince them of his Omnipresence, Prescience, Providence, Mercy, Justice, and absolute Government over the whole Creation; or to inspire them with the deeper Regard to him; or to revive it in them, when obliterated or extinct, thro' the Depravity of human Nature; or to answer any other Designs of his unerring Will. If a true Sense of those divine Attributes is so beneficial, or necessary, as

(*w*) *Hume ibid.* p. 180.

having a most powerful Influence upon Mankind, surely such a constant, uniform, and universal Observation, of what they stile the Laws of Nature, was the most unfit Means to revive it in their Minds, after it had been once obliterated ; and the Experience of all Ages plainly assures us, that the very Hypothesis of it hath only served to extinguish, instead of rekindling it: For what are the wild Systems of the *Stoics* and *Epicureans*, to name no others, but the genuine Off-spring of that unphilosophical Supposition, which hath been ever observed to be the constant Shelter of the most licentious and abandon'd of Men, and the most effectual Means to harden them against all Remorse and Reproofs? In a Word, have not all the enormous Disorders that have ever infected the moral World, both with respect to Theory and Practice, been chiefly owing to that destructive Notion of the World's for ever continuing in the same unalterable Course, and without all Possibility of its ever wanting, or receiving, any Amendment from its Supreme Architect? But enough hath already been said before, against the monstrous Absurdity of excluding the Divine Providence from

from interposing in the extraordinary and miraculous Way we are told, from sufficient Testimony, he did in favour of his moral World, especially as that was the only one consistent with the Liberty of rational Creatures, that could possibly reclaim it, and the doing of it, by such means, every way worthy of the divine Goodness and Wisdom.

It is plain then, notwithstanding all the dogmatical Parade of the Opposers of Miracles, that they have not hitherto produced one fair Argument against their Probability and Possibility, that can outweigh, or even affect, the contrary Evidence we have of them, from Reason and Testimony: I shall therefore hasten to the last Argument they urge against us, and which, tho' no less illogical and unphilosophical than any of the former, must by no means be passed by, especially as it hath been ushered in by some of them, with such a seeming Confidence and Triumph, as if it carried the most irresistible Demonstration (*). I shall content myself with giving you the Substance of it, which is to this Amount;
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(*) See the *Considerer of the Trial of the Witnesses*, p. 96.
Hume Essay on Miracles, Tindal, Collins, & al.

That if God be supposed to have thus miraculously interposed his divine Power in any Age, or to have made use of that extraordinary Method, to reveal his Will to any People, he must of course be concluded to do so in all Ages, and towards all Nations: So that, according to their Way of Reasoning, if Miracles were ever necessary or expedient to answer any of the Designs of the divine Providence, they must be ever so; because, whether the Nature of Things, or the Laws of Nature, be allowed to be changeable, or not, yet God, being unchangeable in his Nature, must still pursue the same Methods, whether we allow the State of the moral World to require it or no; that is, in other Words, if God ever wrought any Miracles, when the State of Mankind made them expedient or necessary, he cannot but continue so working of them, when they cease to be so. This Inference, wild as it is, they draw not only from his Immutability, which hath been already proved to be out of the present Case; but back it by another Argument, no less assuming and inconclusive; *viz.* That he cannot cease to do so, without being chargeable with Partiality towards one Age or Nation, above another. I shall forbear

bear reflecting on the Boldness of such a Charge, as well as on the Presumption of these Writers, who dare thus freely to cavil at the Counsels of infinite Wisdom; which, extending to all Ages, cannot but be above all possible Comprehension: Let it suffice to observe here, that as God will ever act with the same unalterable Wisdom, Goodness, and Justice, towards his Creatures, so he will always display the same miraculous Interposition, whenever the State and Circumstances of the moral World make it expedient or requisite; but at no other time doth it follow, that he must or can do so, because, according to their own Confession, he can do nothing in vain. That he condescended to act in this miraculous manner, upon some particular Occasions, at some particular Times, when nothing less than such an extraordinary Interposition, could reduce Mankind from those Enormities into which it was plunged, both with regard to their Religion and Morals, as both were then established and upheld by the civil and priestly Power, and under the Pretence of the divine Sanction, we have such sufficient Evidence, as they have not been able hitherto to overthrow. But after he had, by a long Series of Wonders, made

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so ample a Manifestation of his Will, Nature, Attributes, given them the most sensible Proofs both of his over-ruling Power, and of his high Displeasure at their abominable superstitious Idolatries, inhuman Rites, by the severest Punishment of those whom the milder Displays of his Arm could not soften into an Acknowledgement of his Almighty Power and Sovereignty, as in the Instance of the *Egyptians* and *Canaanites*, of which see the next Essay; lastly, after he had caused those Wonders to be recorded in such indelible Characters, both under the *Mosaic* and much more so under the Christian Dispensation; where could there be any occasion for renewing and repeating them in every Age and Nation, when the Memory of them, if duly preserved, was of itself sufficient to answer all the Ends for which they had been wrought? Now, that they have been so preserved in the sacred Records of the Old and New Testament, the frequent and vain Efforts, and illusory Shifts, the Opposers have hitherto used to discredit those sacred Books, in which they are recorded, would of themselves afford us a sufficient Proof, had we no other Evidence of their divine Authority, or were those Facts which they relate destitute
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of that Cloud of Testimonies which we have of them, from all Antiquity, and from Foes, as well as Friends, of the *Jewish* and *Christian* Revelation. But I have already said enough on this Head; and may have occasion to resume and back it with some fresh Proofs, in some of the following Essays. But before I take my Leave of them, and the Subject of Miracles, I cannot pass by a new illusory Argument, or rather an old one, in a new Dress, they have started to invalidate this pressing Testimony we urge against them; especially, because it may, tho' a poor one, chance to impose on such of their Readers as are either byassed in their Favour, or too indolent to look beyond the Surface of it. One of the last Writers gives it to us, in Words to this Purpose: Most Religions, whether antient or modern, and how different soever from one another, were at first established on the like pretended Evidence of Miracles; which, if of any Weight, would argue them to be all alike true, and to stand alike on a solid Foundation; which yet must appear to be absolutely impossible, to every one who considers their vast Contrariety. To make this Assertion appear more plausible,

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we are reminded of an *Apollonius Tyaneus* at *Rome*, a *Simon Magus* at *Samaria*, an *Alexander* in *Paphlagonia*, a *Titus* at *Alexandria*, and many others, who are recorded to have wrought much the same Miracles which are urged in Confirmation of the Christian Revelation. Next to these are brought in sundry Legends, both new and old, of Popish Miracles; to which the Essay-writer lately quoted hath added a Catalogue of others published some time since at *Paris*; and affirmed to have been wrought at the Tomb of a *Jansenist* Saint; all which, if we will take his Word for it, are as fully attested, and as universally believed, as those recorded in the Gospel (y): In consequence of which, he makes no Scruple to put them all on the same Level, and to pronounce them mere Delusions, and Impositions upon Mankind. A modest Inference this, and of a Piece with the Premises; but of which I shall take no farther Notice, than to observe, from the Whole, what impartial Regard these great Pretenders to Reasoning pay to that vast Number and Variety of irrefragable Arguments, which have been urged by much

(y) *Hume Essay on Miracles*, p. 192, & seq.

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abler Pens, in Confutation of so odious and unjust a Parallel; and to shew, beyond all Contradiction, the vast, and almost infinite Disparity there is between the Miracles recorded in our sacred Books, and those which are opposed to them, either with respect to their Nature or Evidence. Instead, therefore, of treading the same irksome Road, of proving afresh what hath been so fully and clearly demonstrated by so many learned and judicious Men (z), I think we may fairly challenge them to prove that pretended Parity, by some stronger Arguments than those that have been hitherto used to confute it, before they venture to urge it again on their own bare Word, and against such Evidence to the contrary. As for those of more modern Date, which the same Author hath mustered up in his Essay on this Subject, they have been so fully and judiciously exploded by one of your Reverend Brethren (a), that you will easily excuse my taking no farther Notice of them here. Upon the Whole, I shall readily submit

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(z) *Vid. Grot. de verit. L'Abadie, Limborch, Bentley, Clark, Bullock, Middleton, Lesley's Short Method with the Deists, & al. sup. citat.*

(a) *Adams's Essay against Hume, p. 72, & seq.*

to the Judgment of every candid Reader, Who hath the juster Claim to impartial Reasoning, they who from this general, tho' false Pre-
tence to Miracles, conclude that some real ones must have been wrought, to give Rise to it; or those, who from the Uncertainty and Absurdity of some, pronounce all the rest, how reasonable or well soever attested, to be equally false?

By this time, I hope I have sufficiently answered all the Objections which have been hitherto raised against the Reality and Evidence of Miracles; and by that means cleared, in some measure, the way to the subsequent Essays; in which I am to remove the Difficulties which your neighbouring Antagonists urge against those which were wrought in *Egypt*, and in the Land of *Canaan*. And if the Subject I have been upon hath been so far exhausted, by much better Hands, that it was scarcely possible for me to add any new Thing to it, I hope you'll find the subsequent ones treated in a more untrite, tho' no less clear and satisfactory way, than they have hitherto been: And if I have taken the Liberty to suspend the taking Notice of those
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which they have raised against those two celebrated Transactions, the miraculous Passage of the *Israelites* thro' the *Red Sea*; and the supernatural Solstice obtained by *Joshua's* Prayer, in Favour of the *Gibeonites*, his new Allies and Profelytes; it is for no other Reason, but because they are so fully, and, in my Opinion, so satisfactorily cleared up in that Book, which I had once the Pleasure to recommend to your Perusal (b); and which hath since met with such Approbation, that I am highly pleased to hear, by the public Proposals and Advertisements given about, it is now ready for a third Edition: For if what I have hitherto said on the Subject of Miracles, be thought sufficient, by your sceptic Neighbours, to answer all the Objections that have been urged against their Reality and Evidence, as well as against the Character and Authority of the inspired Historians; as I can hardly question but it will, if they are the judicious and candid Opponents you represent them to be; you may safely refer them to that Book for a full Satisfaction to all that they, or any other Objectors, have said or written against them:

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(b) *Universal History*, Folio Edit. Vol. i. Chap. 7. Sect. 6, 7. Octavo Edit. Vol. iii. Page 390, & seq. 404—419.

Tho', if there should still be any Doubt or Difficulty left, which they think not sufficiently cleared up; or if they should chance to start up any new ones against either of those two extraordinary Events; I shall not be wanting in my Readiness and Endeavours, according to my small Ability, to remove them, as soon as you shall be pleased to apprise me of them.

If the following Essays have the good Fortune to answer the End proposed with your sceptic Friends, I shall readily embrace any Opportunity you shall afford me, of pursuing hereafter the same laudable Tract; especially as they pretend to you, that these you have sent me, in this first Packet, are but a small Sketch, in Comparison of what they can muster up against the Authority of our sacred Books. But on the other hand, if you should find our Endeavours, as far as they have gone, to come short of our Expectation, I beg you will apprise me of it, by a Line, seeing you and I can spend our time to a much better Purpose, than in vainly trying to wash a Black-moor white. I rest, dear Sir,

*Your ever affectionate
and obliged, &c.*

L E T T E R II.

*On the Lord's Judgments threatened
and executed upon the Gods of Egypt,
Exod. xii. 11. ad fin.*

Reverend Sir,

THE Text, you may remember, runs thus: *For I will pass through the Land of Egypt this Night, and will smite all the First-born in the Land of Egypt, both Man and Beast; and against all the Gods of Egypt will I execute Judgments. I am the Lord.* But what is meant by *the Gods of Egypt*, and in what manner this *Judgment was executed upon them* by God, is what hath hitherto been variously, and, I may add, unsatisfactorily accounted for, by all the Expositors I have hitherto met with; some of them interpreting the Words *Elohe Mizraim*, the Gods of *Egypt*, of the Princes or Rulers of that Nation, which are sometimes in the Scriptures stiled Gods (Psal. lxxxii. 6.) and who, following their King in his Pursuit of the *Israelites*, perished with him, and his Host, in the *Red Sea*: Others understanding the Word *Elohim* to mean no more than the *Idols*, which they carried about with

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them in their Armies on all such Emergencies, and which were all swallowed up by the Waves on that remarkable Night. In this Sense, the antient *Jews*, and particularly the Author of the Book of *Wisdom*, understood it; and the latter subjoins the following Remark upon the extraordinary Completion of that threatened Judgment, *That the Idol which is made with Hands is cursed, as well as he that made it, being both alike hateful to God, and both deserving to be punished by him: Therefore, adds he, upon the Idols of the Gentiles shall there be a Visitation, because the Creature of God is made thereby to become an Abomination, and a Stumbling-block, to the Souls of Men, a Snare to the Feet of the Unwise, the Occasion of spiritual Fornication, and of the Corruption of Mens Lives.* *Wisd. xiv. 8—12.*

But whoever seriously weighs the Importance, Dignity, and Design, of this whole miraculous Transaction, will hardly allow either of those Interpretations to be answerable to, or worthy of, such a solemn and dreadful Denunciation. First, Not answerable to it, because this Judgment was to be
executed.

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executed not at the fatal Destruction of the *Egyptians* at the *Red Sea*, but on the same Night in which all the First-born of the Nation were to be miraculously cut off. Secondly, Not worthy of it, because, from the very Tenour of it, it plainly appears to be levelled against something greater than Princes or Magistrates, who were to be alike Sufferers with the rest of the People in the Loss of their First-born, from *Pharaoh*, their haughty Monarch, down to the lowest Slave in his Dominions; and much less can it be supposed to have been levelled against their dumb and senseless Idols. The Words therefore which we translate, *I will execute Judgment*, or rather *Judgments*, as the Text hath it, must mean something of an higher Nature than the bare drowning of their Rulers or Idols in the *Red Sea*; and the Words *Ani Jehovab*, which conclude the Verse, and which we translate, *I am the Lord*, but may be more properly rendered, I, even I, *Jehovab*, or the Supreme Being, ~~will perform it~~, plainly shew, that nothing less here is threatened, than the whole Colluvies of false *Egyptian* Deities, as they stand justly opposed to the true and only God, whom

Pharaoh had hitherto refused to acknowledge, notwithstanding the Variety of Miracles which *Moses* had already wrought in his Name, and such as the very *Magicians* had been forced to own were wrought by the only Finger of the Supreme Being.

But to make this, and what I am farther to say, in order to display the genuine Sense of the Text in Question, still plainer, it will be necessary to take the Matter a little higher, and make some previous Remarks on the Nature and Design of this divine and miraculous Dispensation, from the Account which the inspired *Hebrew* Lawgiver hath given us of it; and from which it will plainly appear, that tho' the Deliverance of the *Israelites* from their present dreadful Thralldom seems to be the main Point in View; yet God had still a much higher and nobler Design in it, namely, to convince not only the *Egyptians*, now more immediately concerned in it, but by that means all other Nations, far and near, of these three important Truths; viz. 1. That the Lord *Jehovah*, whom the *Hebrews* worshiped, was the Supreme Being, the Creator, and sole Governor and Disposer, of
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all Things. 2. That all the other pretended Deities, which either the *Egyptians*, or any other heathen Nations, worshiped, as Mediators and Benefactors, whether the celestial Bodies, Angels, Demons, &c. were either Fictions of their own Brain, or, at best, Beings created by him, and intirely subordinate to his supreme Power and Disposal. And, 3. That the *Hebrews*, now groaning under their severe Servitude, were the peculiar People of that one only Supreme and Almighty Being; in consequence of which he sent *Pharaoh* this special Message, and absolute Command, to let them go and serve him, under the dreadful Penalty, in case of Refusal, of being made to feel the most severe Effects of his Anger and Resentment. This last is plainly implied in those Words of God to *Moses* (c): *Thus shalt thou say unto Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord* (or *Jehovah*, the supreme and only God), *Israel is my Son, First-born; and I say unto thee, Let Israel go, that he may serve me; and, if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy Son, even thy First-born.*

With

(c) *Exod.* iv. 22, 23. *vid.* & *Cap.* vii. 17. ix. 13. & *seq.* x. 2. & *seq.* x. *pass.*

With respect to the first of these three grand Points; *viz.* That *Jehovah*, the God of the *Hebrews*, was the Supreme Creator and Governor of all Things; it is a Thing, which, considering the then reigning Theology of the *Egyptians*, and the miserable Figure which the *Hebrews* then made in the World, could hardly come into the Head of *Pharaoh*, or of any of his People. Some of them had, indeed, a right Notion of a Supreme Being, whom they called *Cneph*, or *Eneph*, and believed him to be the Creator, or, as they stiled him, the Architect of the World, and the only immortal God (*d*): But, beside that it was peculiar to the Priests of *Thebais*, or *Upper Egypt* (*B*), whilst those of the *Lower Egypt*

(*d*) *Plutarch in Isid. & Osirid. vid. & Cumberland in Cosmog. Sanchionat. p. 12, & seq.*

(*B*) This *Cneph*, or *Eneph*, have signified the World, they represented in an human Shape, holding a Sceptre, and a Girdle, with a royal Plume on his Head, and an Egg coming out of his Mouth; the latter of which some interpret to others the God *Phtha* or *Vulcan* (*1*). And the Worshipers of that supreme Deity are affirmed to have been particularly distinguished from the rest by an Exemption from the

(*1*) *Euseb. Præp. Evang. lib. iii. c. 4.*

Tax

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Egypt were sunk into the grossest Idolatry (e), had that Doctrine been ever so universally held, it is scarcely to be supposed, that *Pharaoh*, or any of his Sages, should be so easily persuaded, that such a Set of poor and enslaved Strangers could be the peculiar and favourite People of that Supreme Deity. The Thing will still appear more unlikely, if we suppose, with some learned Men, that the *Egyptian* Monarch, to whom *Moses* was sent, and whom he styles a new King, or a King of a new Family, who knew not *Joseph* (f), was of the Race of those *Hycsos* or Shepherds, which over-ran and enslaved the whole Land of *Egypt*; and that these were the *Horims*, or *Horites*, whom the *Edomites*, or Children of *Esau*, had driven out of the Country (g), and forced to seek new Settlements elsewhere, much about this time, which
those

(e) *Vid. ibid. Euseb. Præpar. lib. i. c. 7. Jamblic. ap. Cudworth Intel. Syst. p. 412. & seq.*

(f) *Exod. i. 8.*

(g) *Deut. ii. 12. 22.*

Tax that was levied to- worshiped by the idolatrous
wards the Maintenance of Part (2).
those Animals which were

(2) *Plutarch de Isid. & Osirid. Vide Lumbert. in Cosmog. Sanchoniat. p. 12, & seq.*

those Authors think the most probable Conjecture concerning those Shepherds; for they were a People that lived by Pasturage; and, being seated Eastward of *Egypt*, had but a short and strait Passage thither (C); for these, being

(C) Who those *Hyc-fos*, or as these two Words imply, *King-shepherds*, were, is indeed hard to guess. *Manetho* brought them from *Arabia* (1), and *Africanus*, from *Phœnice* (2), and from the Eastern Parts, ἐν τῶν παρὰ ἀνατολὴν μερῶν, by which might as well be meant the *Land of Canaan*, those two Countries being often confounded: And his Assertion is not a little confirmed, by their fortifying all the Eastern Borders after their settling in *Egypt*, to prevent their being followed thither by those who had driven them out of their antient Territories.

As to the time of this Invasion, *S. Marsham* places it 157 Years before the

Exod; and *Sir Isaac Newton*, soon after the Time of *Joshua* entering into *Canaan* (3). But it is more likely, that they had already been driven out of *Egypt* by *Amosis*, King of *Thebais*, or *Upper Egypt*, some time before *Joseph's* being sold thither; and that thence proceeded the Aversion which the *Egyptians* bore to all Shepherds (4). It is true, there is another Reason given for that Aversion, but such as carries but little Weight; viz. *Because the Shepherds slew, and lived upon the Flesh of, those Sheep, Oxen, &c. which the Egyptians worshiped*. But this could easily have been prevented, by making some severe Law against it; and

(1) *Ap. Joseph. cont. Apion.*

(2) *Sync. p. 61. Canon. Chron.*

(3) *Newton's Chronology.*

(4) *Genesis xliii. 32. xlv. 34.*

then,

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being still more degenerated in their Religion; had, in all Likelihood, lost all Notion of one Supreme Being; so that when *Moses* addressed their Monarch with this strange Message, Thus says *Jehovah*, or the one Supreme Deity, he might be well surprised at it, and answer, that he knew of no such Supreme Deity; and therefore, in a kind of Defiance to it, not only refused to let the *Israelites* go, but made them feel a more severe Servitude than they had done till then. But we need not have recourse to the *Horites*, as some learned Men have done (*b*), for a King or People capable of returning so arrogant an Answer to the Divine Message; seeing any

(*b*) *Vid. Shuckford's Connect.* vol. ii. lib. 7.

then, in all other respects, the Shepherds Life would have been an honourable one, they being the Guardians and Protectors of those sacred Animals. And accordingly we are told, that the Goatherds of the Province of *Mendez* were highly respected, where that Creature was held in particular Veneration (5). It is more

likely therefore, that their Aversion to Shepherds was owing to that Slavery which they underwent under them, during the Space of almost 260 Years; and that they were *Canaanites*, who fled from those Wars which every petty Kingdom waged, from the earliest of time, against each other; of which, see *Gen. xiv. pass.*

(5) *Herod.* lib. ii. c. 42.

any of the Monarchs of *Lower Egypt*, and, we may add, of any other heathen Nation, would, upon the like Occasion, have behaved in the very same manner; especially as it was backed with no better Authority than that of the Messenger's bare Word. However, whether that *Pharaoh* was of *Egyptian*, or any other Race; and whether the Meaning of his Answer was, that he did not know or acknowledge such a Supreme Deity; or that he did not believe this pretended God of the *Hebrews* to be Him; it plainly appears by the whole Tenour of *Moses's* Commission and Miracles, that God's Design was to convince him, and his People, of both those important Truths, by such infallible Signs as should at once extort from him a free Confession of them, and an infallible Compliance with the Divine Command.

The second Point which the *Egyptians* were to be made sensible of, by this Divine Message, and which is but a natural Consequence of the first, was, that all the other pretended Deities, both of the *Egyptians*, and other heathen Nations, whether Angels, Demons, and the like, or the Stars and Planets,

&c.

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&c. were either mere Illusions and Fictions of Mens Brains, or, at best, but Beings created by *Jehovah*, the Supreme Creator and Governor of the Universe; and wholly subordinate to his over-ruling Power, and unerring Providence. But this Doctrine, reasonable and just as it was in itself, could not but meet with the most strenuous Opposition, not only from the heathen Priests, but from the Laity too, considering that Polytheism had then over-run the greatest Part of the World; and that *Lower Egypt* was, at that time, so overstocked with those imaginary Deities, and so stupidly fond of that superstitious Sort of Worship, that they had altogether forgot that of the Supreme Being, if not the very Notion of him; insomuch that we are told (i) no Country abounded with Idols of all kinds like it, in all the World. And I may add, that it was chiefly from thence, that *Assyria*, *Babylon*, *Phœnice*, *Greece*, and other Nations, received their chief Deities. *Belus*, whatever was his original Name, was an *Egyptian*; and is recorded to have led a Colony to *Babylon*, and built the chief Temple there; for

(i) *Herodot.* lib. ii. *Euseb. Demonstr. Evang. Joseph.*
&c.

for which they honoured him with the Name of *Belus*, which was that of their Founder (*k*). *Danaus* was another considerable Person, who brought the *Egyptian* Theology from *Egypt* to *Argos* (*l*), and became King of it. *Cecrops* did the same in *Attica*, where, having married the Daughter of *Actæus*, he succeeded him in that Kingdom; and from him the Country was, for some time, called *Cecropia*, as it had been before called *Actica*, from *Actæus* (*m*). The Father of *Cadmus* was an *Egyptian*, and brought the *Egyptian* Religion into *Phœnicia*, and reigned there; and from his Son *Phœnix* the Country had its Name; and his other Son, *Cadmus*, who had likewise been brought up in it, under him, conveyed it, with him, to *Thebes*; and hence the Dispute among the Learned, Whether he were an *Egyptian* or *Phœnician*: He was the former only by Extract, and the latter by Birth (*n*). *Lelex*, another famed *Egyptian*, had, some small time before

(*k*) *Diod. Sicul. lib. i. Shuckford's Connect. p. 2. 18.*

(*l*) *Iid. ibid. Pausan. Argol. & Corinth. c. 16, & seq.*

(*m*) *Iid. in Attic. vid. Chronic. Marm. & Prid. Annot. in eund. Usser's Chronol. &c.*

(*n*) See Sir *J. Marsham's Can. Chron. p. 118. Prid. Not. Histor. ad Chron. Marm. Shuckford's Connect. p. 2. lib. viii. & al.*

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before this of *Moses's* Mission, settled several Colonies in *Caria*, *Ionia*, *Ida* near *Troy*, in *Acarnania*, *Ætolia*, *Bæotia* (o); and last of all, in *Laconia*, of which he became the first King (p); in which Countries he likewise introduced the *Egyptian* Religion, Rites, and Government. Many more Instances might be brought of their great Personages, who abandoned *Egypt*, either to avoid the Tyranny of their new Invaders, the King-shepherds above-mentioned, or upon some other Motive; and, dispersing themselves into various Countries, brought thither with them the *Egyptian* Theology, and introduced the Worship of the *Egyptian* Deities wherever they settled. But these few will suffice to shew, at once, where this Notion of Polytheism had its Origin, and what ready and universal Reception it met with every-where: And this raised the Reputation of the *Egyptian* Priests and Sages to such an Height, that those of other Nations, not content with what had been brought to them from hence by others, were eager to travel

F thither,

(o) *Pausan. in Att. c. 39. Strabo's Geog. lib. 7, 9,*
14. *Homer's Il. o. 86, & seq.*
(p) *Pausan, ibid.*

thither, in order to be still more deeply instructed in their Mysteries, Rites, and other Branches of Learning, for which they were no less famous. I may add, that their being so justly extolled for their superior Skill in all other Sciences, proved a most effectual Means of recommending their Religion to them also; for who could imagine otherwise, but that the Theology and Worship of so learned and polite a People must be answerable to their other Learning? And this Notion was accordingly so universally received, that whatever the Learned of other Nations met with in it, that seemed to shock their Reason, they readily chose to suppose some deep Mystery to be wrapped up in it, rather than to think that any thing, either absurd or unreasonable, could possibly be contained in the Religion of so wise a People; not considering, as *St. Paul* rightly observes (*q*), that it was this boasted Wisdom that made them become vain in their Imaginations; so that, pretending themselves to be wiser than all the rest of Mankind, they became foolish and monstrous in their Notions of the Deity, above all other Nations; intro-

(*q*) *Rom. i. 21. & seq.*

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introducing, instead of one only Supreme, Almighty, and All-wise Being, an infinite Number and Variety of inferior Deities; and sinking into such a Degree of Folly and Depravity, as to worship not only all the celestial Bodies, Angels, Demons, Heroes, &c. but even Beasts, Fowls, Reptiles, and Plants; whilst, on the other hand, they suffered their Pride to swell to such a monstrous Height, as to challenge an extravagant Antiquity above all other Nations, and to pretend to have been governed by a long Series of Gods and Demigods, above 34,000 Years before *Menes*, their first Monarch of human Race. These were the boasted Sages whom *Moses* was, now, not only to enter the Lists with (for their Monarchs seldom, if ever, did or resolved any thing of Moment, without previously consulting them), but was to convince, by irrefragable Proofs, that all the boasted Variety of Deities, which they worshiped, were mere Delusions of their own Brain, an Imposition upon Mankind, or, at the most, that they were only Beings created by, and wholly subordinate to, the great and only God *Jehovah*; in whose Name, and by whose express Orders, he was sent to demand the

immediate Release of the oppressed *Israelites*. No wonder then that *Moses* should express such an extraordinary Reluctancy against, and devise so many idle Pretences, to excuse himself from undertaking so arduous and dangerous a Commission, even after all the singular Encouragement which God was pleased to give him, at that first miraculous Conference (r), and the infallible Promise of his supernatural Assistance.

But, thirdly, *Moses* was to convince *Pharaoh*, and his Sages, that this Supreme Being, this Sole and Almighty Lord of the Universe, was, in a more peculiar manner, the God of the poor oppressed *Hebrews*; and that, tho' now groaning under so severe a Thralldom, they had been a long time his chosen People, his First-born above all other Nations under Heaven, and in whose behalf he was now ready to display his irresistible Power, and inflict on that haughty Monarch, and his People, the most dreadful Judgments, in case they were not immediately dismissed out of the Land (s). Strange Message this to

(r) *Exod.* iii. iv.

(s) *Ibid.* vii. & seq. pass.

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to the *Egyptian* King and Court, take it all together! that there should be but one Supreme *Jehovah* in the whole Universe; that he should make choice of the most despicable People upon Earth to be his favourite Nation above all others; and that he should so far interest himself in their Deliverance, as to smite the whole Land with such terrible Punishments, as none of that infinite Variety of Deities, which were worshiped there, should be able to avert. Well might *Pharaoh* tell the Messenger, that he knew of no such an over-ruling Power as he spoke to him of; which was a thing he never heard of, and point-blank opposite to the then *Egyptian* Theology: For if any of the wiser Sort of his Priests or Magicians had any Notion left of a Supreme Being, as many of the Philosophers of other Nations had; yet the Belief of his having transferred the Care of all sublunary Things to the Stars, Planets, and other inferior Deities, prevailed so far every-where, that it had quite obliterated that of his over-ruling Providence. How could they therefore be persuaded to think, that he should concern himself so far in the Release of a despicable Set of

Strangers, that seemed born to perpetual Slavery: The most, therefore, that they could gather, from *Moses's* dreadful Threats, was, that he designed to surprize them with some strange Feats, but such as the Magicians told *Pharaoh* he needed not be frightened at, seeing they themselves professed the same Art, and would quickly convince him, that they were as dextrous at it as he (t). And if we may believe *Josephus* (u), and the *Talmud* (w), *Egypt* abounded with such at that time, to that degree, that some of them flouted *Moses* with this Saying, with regard to the two or three first Miracles, *Thou bringest Straw to Afra*, or, as we may English it, *Thou bringest Coals to Newcastle*, in pretending to play thy conjuring Tricks here. But by what Art or Power these wrought theirs, whether by mere Legerdemain, or some strange Delusion, caused on the Sight of the Beholders, or by the Help of Demons, or by some occult natural Operation, as some antient Fathers, and a much greater Number of learned Moderns, have imagined

(t) *Exod.* vii. 11. *Vid Philo in vit. Mos.*

(u) *Antiq.* l. ii. c. 13.

(w) *Tract. Sanhedr.*

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gined (x); or by some deeper Insight into natural Magic; or, lastly, by Witchcraft, and the Help of the Devil, as St. *Austin*, and many other antient and modern, contend for; will be more clearly seen in the Sequel: All that need be said here, is, that *Moses*, in the Relation he has given us of this extraordinary Contest, makes no Difference between his own Miracles, and those of the Magicians; which he would certainly have done, had theirs been no more than a *deceptio visus*: Accordingly he tells us in one Place, that they flung down their Rods, as he had done, and that they became Serpents (y), and not that they only appeared such; and in the two following Trials of the Waters turned into Blood, and of the Frogs, he expressly says, that *the Magicians, even they, did the same likewise, by their Incantments*: So that there can be no room left to doubt of the Reality of the one, more than of the other.

F 4

But

(x) *Iust. Mart. Quæst. Orthod. 16. Tertul. de Anima, Greg. Nyssen. Hieron. cont. Jovin. &c. vid. & Joseph. lib. ii. c. 13. Grot. Le Clerc, & al.*

(y) *Exod. vii. 12.*

But to return to the true and real Intent of the Divine Providence in this wonderful Contest between its commissioned Messenger and the *Egyptian* King, and his Magicians; we have already seen how *Egypt* was at this time not only immersed in the strangest, and most monstrous Polytheism, but had likewise infected most other Nations, far and near, with it; and, I might have added, that a great Number of inhuman and unnatural Rites had also been gradually introduced into the Worship of those false Deities, which were destructive of common Society, and a Scandal to human Nature itself (*D*); all which now
loudly

(*D*) It hath indeed been questioned, whether the Worship of the *Egyptians*, *Canaanites*, &c. had any such abominable Rites, at least so early as *Moses's* time, if at all; and I must own, it is not easy to fix the time when they were first introduced among them. As for human Sacrifices, it cannot be proved, that any were offered by them before *Abraham's* time, whatever any Antient or Moderns may say to the contrary (*I*); but that they became common soon after, is not to be doubted; and it is not improbable, that the intended Sacrifice of that Patriarch, who was in very high Esteem among all those Nations, might give Rise to them; and that that of *Chronus*, mentioned

(*I*) *Vide Phil. de vit. Abraham.* Sir *J. Marsham's Can. Chron. Shaftesbury's Charact.* vol. iii. p. 2.

by

loudly called for his interposing Hand, and the Accomplishment of that solemn Promise which he had made to *Abraham*, some Centuries

by *Sanchoniatho* (2), was an Imitation of it, if not the same, under different Names, and with additional Circumstances (3); and that the *Egyptians* used them in their Worship of *Osiris*, *Juno*, and *Lucina*, we have no Reason to doubt (4): For *Amosis* was the first of their Monarchs who abolished them, and ordered waxen Images to be offered in their stead (5).

It is likewise disputed, whether the frequent Expression used in the *Old Testament*, of making their Children to pass thro' the Fire to *Moloch*, and other Deities, implies a real burning

of them alive, or only the bare carrying them thro' the Flames, by way of Purification. The *Jews* do, indeed, insist on the latter, by way of excusing their Imitation of that Rite (6): But if we had no other Authority for the other Sense, that which the sacred Historian relates of its Practice at *Tophet* (7), as well as the Psalmist (8), would be sufficient to explode that *Jewish* Evasion: Besides, if there had been no more in it, than they pretend, God would hardly have forbid it in such strong Terms, and under such severe Penalties (9).

(2) *Ap. Euseb. Præp. Evang.*

(3) *Vide Shuckford's Connect. vol. ii. lib. 6.*

(4) *Diod. Sicul. lib. i. Manetho ap. Porphy. Plut. in Osir.*

(5) *Ibid. ibid. vide Euseb. ubi sup. lib. iv. c. 16. Wisdom xii. 3. & seq.*

(6) *Vide int. al. Maimon. More Nevoch. l. iii. c. 28.*

(7) *2 Kings xxiii. 10. 2 Chron. xxviii. 3.*

(8) *Pf. cvi. 37, 38.*

(9) *Vide Levit. xx. 2, 3.*

turies before (2). And what Country could be a more proper Scene for this wonderful Display of his Almighty Power, than that which had been both the Mother and Nurse of such a strange Variety of false Deities, the Inventress of such a superstitious and abominable Worship? But neither were these fearful Judgments to be confined to *Egypt* only; for those Nations that had been infected with it, and more especially all the Nations of *Canaan*, were afterwards to feel the Effect of them, in order to make both the one and the other sensible of the wretched Folly and Stupidity of putting their Confidence in such false and imaginary Deities, as neither could hurt nor benefit them, instead of acknowledging and relying on the unerring Providence of the All-wise and Almighty Creator and Governor of the Universe.

But, in order to work so unexpected and universal a Conviction in so many different Nations, so long enured and hardened in their idolatrous Superstition, what Method could be more effectual, and worthy of an all-wise gracious God, than that which he was pleased to make

(2) *Genesis* xv. 13, & seq.

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make use of; condescending to enter into a kind of Competition with the vast Multitude of their pretended Deities, and by this surprising Display of his uncontrollable Power over the seven Planets, as well as four Elements, over which they were supposed to preside, in such a great and dreadful Variety of Instances, to convince their stupid Voraries of the Non-entity of the greatest Part of them, such as their pretended Gods of the Air, Sea, Water, and Earth, their Demons, Mediators, Demigods, &c.; and that those whom they placed in the highest Rank, such as the Luminaries, and other celestial Bodies, were no other than necessary Agents, wholly subordinate to his supreme Power and Direction; or, according to his own energetic Words, so frequently repeated thro' this whole Transaction, that they might know, that he alone was *Jehovah*, or the only Sovereign, Governor, and Moderator, of the Universe? This was, indeed, a most effectual Method of bringing that momentous Contest to a fair and easy Trial, and so suited to the meanest Capacity (*b*), as well as to the most refined Genius, that neither
of

(*b*) *Exodus vii. 5. & alib. pass.*

of them could be at a Loss how to make a true Judgment upon it : It was using Men as rational Creatures, and directing them, without the least Infringement or Invasion on their native Freedom, to judge where to assign the Palm of Victory. It was, in a Word, appealing to their Senses, Experience, and rational Faculties, by such infallible Tokens, as the lowest Mechanic could as easily judge for himself as the most sublime Reasoner, or profound Philosopher : Either of them might be held in Suspense for a while, not only whilst *Pharaoh's* Magicians imitated some of *Moses's* Miracles, but even after they had been nonplused by him, and forced to acknowledge the supreme Power of God, as their Confession might be as well suspected to have been a mere Cloak to cover their Ignorance or Incapacity ; and tho' *Moses* had all the way, even from the Beginning, the much greater Advantage over them, especially when they appeared with their Swarms of Lice (c) about them, or hid themselves, to conceal their Boils and Blotches (d) ; yet still the

(c) *Ibid.* viii. 18. & seq.

(d) *Ibid.* ix. 11.

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the People might only infer from it, that *Moses* was only a greater Conjuror than they; or, at most, that the God of the *Hebrews* had hitherto shewed himself more powerful than those of the *Egyptians*; but this they might still ascribe to any other Cause, unknown to them, rather than to suppose the former the only supreme God, and the latter no Gods at all; for thus, stupidly, do we find the *Syrians* reasoning, after having received a total Overthrow from the *Israelites*, that *their Gods were Gods of the Mountains*; and that *there could no Head be made against them, unless they could be brought down into the Vallies (e), and be obliged to fight on plain Ground*. Any Pretence would easily account for this Disparity of Power among People who believed a Plurality of Gods, and did not acknowledge a supreme one over all the rest. The *Philistines* could see their *Dagon* fallen in Pieces before the Ark, and themselves plagued with Emrods, &c. without abating one Tittle of their Regard for their dismembred Idol (f), that could neither defend itself, nor heal them. Where then is the

(e) 1 Kings xx. 23.

(f) 1 Sam. v. 1. & seq.

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the Wonder, that *Pharaoh*, and his Court, should continue obstinate and rebellious, in spite of all the grievous Plagues he and his People had felt from the turning the Waters into Blood to the three Days total and most dreadful Darkness which overspread the whole Land? I do not hereby pretend to excuse, much less to justify, this their Obstinacy, and Hardness of Conviction, against such dire and awakening Judgments. All I would observe here is, what a stubborn, and almost invincible Obstacle, their Notion of Polytheism, and other Prejudices, which they had imbibed with their Religion (especially when backed with Self-interest, and Unwillingness of dismissing so many hundred thousands of useful Slaves), was to their passing a more equitable and impartial Judgment on *Moses's* Miracles.

It is, indeed, said in many Places, that God would, and that he had hardened that Monarch's Heart against Conviction (*g*); and in one Place, that he had raised him up for that very End, that he might shew his Power, and declare his Name over all the Earth (*h*).
But

(*g*) *Exod. iv. 21. & alib. pass.*

(*h*) *Ibid. ix. 16. Rom. ix. 17.*

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But it will here scarcely be needful to remind your Opponent, that the former of those Expressions, according to the Genius of the *Hebrew* Tongue, implies at most but a bare Permission; and the latter, that God had suffer'd him to reign so far, though he might long before have cut him off for his Obstinacy and Disobedience; that he might convince him, and all the World, of his being the only supreme Governor of it. And in this Sense both those Expressions are understood and interpreted by the best Expositors, to which I shall refer (i) those who are not sufficiently versed in the Text (E). But I cannot

(i) See among the rest, Pelling, Whitby, Limborch, Le Clerc, Shuckford, and Un. Hist. 8vo Edit. vol. iii. p. 372 (D).

(E) That *Moses* meant no more by them than to express *Pharaoh's* invincible Obstinacy, is plain, not only from many such parallel Phrases, where the Mountains, Cedars, &c. of God mean no more than their vast Height, Strength, and the like (10); but likewise by the singular Pains he took to make that Monarch comply with God's Commands; which he could hardly have done, had he thought that his Refusal had been the Effect of God's irrevocable Doom to destroy him, and his People. It is very remarkable, that as to the Words,

(10) *Vid. int. al. Ps. xxxvi. 6. lxxiii. 15. civ. 16.*

not forbear taking Notice here, that the Hebrew Verb *קח* *Chazak*, which we translate *harden*, doth, in its primitive and genuine Sense, signify to *strengthen, encourage, confirm*, and the like; which is either done by Exhortations, Promises, Assistances, &c. or else, as in *Pharaoh's* Case, by Forbearance, sparing or suspending of due Punishment, as fond Parents often do by their stubborn Children; which last Sense seems clearly implied in that Expostulation of God, *As yet, or hitherto, exaltest thou thyself*, or, *art as yet too elated to let my People go* (k)? and that of *Moses* to him, *Glory, thyself, over me, when I intreat the Lord To-morrow* (l); and

(k) *Exod. ix. 17.*

(l) *Ibid. viii. 9.*

Words, *For this very Cause have I raised thee up*, &c. the Exposition I have given above of it, is confirmed by the Septuagint Version, and the Chaldee Paraphrase; the former of whom renders it, *For this End thou hast been hitherto preserved*; and the latter, *For this Cause I have hitherto borne with thee, or held thee up*; either of which much more naturally expresses the Meaning of the Hebrew העמדתי *Heghemadtika*, *I have suffered or caused to stand* (11).

(11) *Vid. Munster. Tremel. Lyran. & al. in loc. & Un. Hist. Octavo, Vol. iii. p. 372. sub not.*

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and in another Place, *I will spread my Hands to the Lord, that the Thunder and Hail may cease, and that thou mayst be convinced that the Earth is the Lord's.* But as for thee, and thy Servants, *I know that ye will not fear the Lord God (m):* Or as the Words *וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים* more emphatically express, *I know that before ye fear the Lord God;* implying thereby, that they must yet feel some heavier Judgment, before they could be brought to a true Sense and Fear of that over-ruling Power. And indeed *Pharaoh's* frequent Prevarication with him, and owning himself no longer in a State of Obedience than whilst the Rod was stretch'd over him, and returning to his old Obstinacy as soon as it was removed, had given but too much room for that threatening Reproof; which was accordingly followed by a still more grievous Plague than any they had hitherto felt; namely, The total Darkness that overspread his whole Realm during three whole Days; the Dread and Grievousness of which *Moses* could not more emphatically express, than by calling it a Darkness that might be

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felt;

(m) *Exod. ix. 29, 30.*

felt; and which did not suffer the *Egyptians* to stir from their Places all the time it lasted (m): For if any of the foregoing ones, especially as they fell only on the *Egyptians*, whilst the *Israelites* were wholly free from them, had already so far shaken their Confidence in their vain Deities, and extorted a Confession from that proud Monarch, that the Lord Jehovah alone was righteous, and he and his People Sinners; a much more powerful Effect must this surprising Darkness make upon them, who till now had looked upon the Sun as the chief Deity of *Egypt*, and saw the whole Land deprived of his benign Light; whilst the *Israelites*, in the Land of *Goshen*, were the only ones that enjoyed their usual Sun-shine (n). How can they now any longer doubt, that this great Luminary, whom they worshiped as the greatest of all their Deities, is really, as *Moses* assured them, subordinate to the God of the *Hebrews*; when they see its most zealous Votaries deprived so long of its cherishing Beams; whilst it is obliged to shine, with its usual Lustre, on those who absolutely disowned its pretended Divine Power?

(m) *Exod.* x. 21, & seq.

(n) *Ibid.* v. 23.

On the Egyptian MIRACLES. 83

Power? And such a Consternation did this last Judgment throw the whole Nation into, and more especially its haughty Monarch, and whole Court, that *Moses* was sent for with all Speed, and told that they were now at full Liberty to depart with their Wives, and their Children, provided they consented to leave their numerous Herds behind. This he doubtless thought a great Concession, and such as would have contented him; but when he was positively answered, that not an Hoof of these should be left in *Egypt*, his Consternation quickly changed into a furious Rage; in the first Part of which he so far forgets himself, and whom he is speaking to, that he orders him immediately to go from his Presence, and never to come to him upon such an Errand, under Pain of Death (a); as if he could still at his Pleasure take the Life of a Man, who had by so many Ways made him sensible, to his Cost, of his own Impotence, either to hurt him, or to ward off the Effects of any of his Threatenings. The Result of this last Interview was, that *Moses* took him at his Word; so that they parted

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in

(a) *Exod.* x. 28.

in great Anger at each other (E); though not without *Moses* previously apprising him of the concluding and most dreadful Judgment of all, the Destruction of all the *Egyptian* First-born; which his obstinate Refusal was now hastening upon him, and his whole Kingdom

(E) A learned Author finds Fault here with our *English*, and most other, Versions, for making *Moses* to depart from *Pharaoh* in Anger; and thinks that the Text rather implies, that it was that Monarch that was angry with him (1): And that the Place should be rendered, *He* (*Moses*) *went out from Pharaoh, who was in a furious Anger* (2). But, besides that the *Hebrew* Construction will not admit of that Sense; and that, in fact, they were most likely in a great Passion against each other; I see nothing inconsistent with *Moses's* Character, had he been the only an-

gry Person: For as his singular Meekness must restrain him from shewing it, in an indecent manner, to the King; so neither could his Zeal for the Honour of God, nor that Monarch's tyrannic Behaviour, permit him to receive his obstinate and threatening Refusal, without some considerable Emotion; especially as that Prince acted more like an hardened Tyrant, on this Occasion, than a Father of his People; and appeared resolved to sacrifice the Lives of so vast a Number of his Subjects, rather than suffer the *Israelites* to take their Herds with them.

(1) *Exod.* xi. 8.

(2) *Shuckford Connect.* tom. ii. l. 9.

On the Egyptian MIRACLES. 85

dom (F); and which he assur'd him would be executed in such an astonishing Manner,

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(F) That *Moses* acquainted the King with the universal Slaughter of the First-born, in this last Interview, is agreed on by most Interpreters; though he hath related them somewhat out of their natural Order, in this eleventh Chapter, after having mentioned his last Parting from *Pharaoh* at the Conclusion of the preceding. So that the Direction given to the People at the Beginning of it, about asking Jewels, and other valuable Things, of the *Egyptians*, is but a short Recapitulation of what he had enjoined them in some of the foregoing ones.

The same must be likewise understood of the Contents of the twelfth Chapter, in which the Passover is instituted, and the manner of celebrating it set forth: For this is but a

Recapitulation of what God had enjoined them to do four Days before, that is, on the tenth Day; whereas this last Message, and the sad Catastrophe that ensued it, happened on the fourteenth Day of the Month (1). As for those who pretend to censure the Orders given the *Israelites* about getting Jewels, and other valuable Things, from the *Egyptians* (2); it will be sufficient to tell them, that the Verb *שאל* *Shaal*, which *Moses* makes use of, signifies to *ask*, or *beg*, and not to *borrow*, as our Version renders it: *Josephus* therefore rightly styles them Gifts or Presents (3): And it can hardly be supposed, that they obtained more of them than they had dearly earned by their long and laborious Servitude.

(1) *Exod.* xii. 3. compar'd with Verses 28, & seq.

(2) *Exod.* xi. 2. xii. 35.

(3) *Antiq.* l. ii. c. 14. ad fin.

not only upon every Rank and Condition, from the highest to the lowest of his Subjects, but even upon all their Cattle, that the Survivors would come crouching to the *Hebrews*, and, in the most submissive and endearing manner, intreat them to be gone (p).

This was indeed the dreadfulest Message that he had hitherto brought to that infatuated King; yet was it such as his Obstinacy against so many others that had gone before, and been so punctually executed, might justly deserve; and the most likely to force him into a Compliance; and, as such, was reserved by God as the finishing Stroke to all the rest. For this was plainly hinted to *Moses* from the Beginning; *Go, and tell Pharaoh, Israel is my Son, my First-born; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy Son, even thy First-born* (q): Which was as much as to say, as appears by the Sequel, If none of the previous Wonders I design to work in thy Sight, nor the fearful Punishments I shall inflict upon thee, and thy Kingdom, can prevail

(p) *Exod. xi. 8.*

(q) *Ibid. iv. 22, & seq.*

On the Egyptian MIRACLES. 87

prevail upon thee to discharge this my favourite People; the Destruction of all the First-born in thy Dominions, from Man to Beast, with which I intend to conclude all my Plagues upon you, shall effectually compel thee to comply. And it is very remarkable here, that the *threatened Judgments on the Gods of Egypt*, which never were once mentioned before, are now joined together with the Death of the First-born; as if the last was to be no other than the effectual Completion of the former: For, says God (r), *I will pass this Night through the Land of Egypt, and destroy all the First-born in it, both of Man and Beast; and against the Gods of Egypt will I execute Judgments: I am the Lord.* So that the Import of this last and most dreadful Message, is plainly this: Since all the Wonders I have hitherto wrought before your Eyes, have not been able to make you acknowledge me the true and only God; nor all the severe Punishments I have already inflicted upon you, which none of the imaginary Gods you fondly confide in were able to avert, have been powerful enough to ex-

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tort

(r) *Exod. xii. 2.*

tort an Obedience to my Commands; this last, which I have kept in reserve as the finishing Stroke, *viz.* the Destruction of all the First-born, shall, in spite of your Obstinacy, oblige you to confess and acknowledge my supreme Power and Authority over the Universe; as well as your own Folly and Blindness, in trusting on any other God but me.

It must be owned, that the Expression here used, *אעשה שפתיים* *Egbesse Shephatim*, which we translate, *I will execute Judgments*, is somewhat vague and obscure. But there is none that is ever so little versed in the Hebrew Language, that doth not know, that it generally imports, *to do or execute Justice, to try and judge a Cause, to pass Sentence of Absolution or Condemnation, to right the Injured, and punish the Injurer, &c.* according to the Nature of the Subject in question (*f*). In this Sense we find much the same Expression used in the last Chapter of the Second Book of Kings, Verse 6, where it is said, That *Nebuchadnezzar*, and his Officers, *dabru*

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(*f*) *Vid. int. al. Num. xxvii. 5.*

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ito Mishpat; or, as *Jeremiah* hath it, *Cap. ult. Ver. 9. Mishpatim*; which our Version rightly renders, *Gave Judgment upon Zedekiah at Ribla*; that is, as the Sequel shews, *pronounced Sentence of Death upon him*. The true Meaning therefore of doing Justice, or executing Judgment, on the false Deities of *Egypt*, can be no other than the bringing the Point in Dispute (whether the *Egyptian* Deities had all, or any, of that Power which their Votaries ascribed to them, or whether the Lord *Jehovah* was the only supreme Governor of the World) to so fair and impartial a Trial, that not only *Pharaoh*, and his Subjects, but all other Nations that came to hear of it, might be enabled to judge of the Issue of it, or pass an equitable Sentence on the Merit of either Side, from the Result of the Whole: And how could this be done in a more rational and satisfactory Manner, than by condescending to enter into this Competition with them? For this was such a plain and irrefragable Appeal to their Reason, Experience, and Senses, as I lately hinted, that had any of our modern Sceptics, who either deny Miracles to be a sufficient Proof of any Doctrine,

trine, or even deny the Possibility of them, been Eye-witnesses of it, it could hardly have failed of extorting at least a tacit Recantation from them, and a conscious Acknowledgement, that such a Series of supernatural Events could be effected by nothing less than by the Interposition of the Supreme and Almighty Lord; and that he was indeed the only God, of whom it could be said, that he did whatsoever he pleased, both in Heaven, Earth, the Sea, and all the deep Abysses (t). But, to make this appear still plainer to every unbiassed Reader, let us now take a short Review of the Design and Management of this whole Transaction.

And, first, Let it be remembred, that the Deliverance of the *Ifraelites* from their long and hard Bondage, was only designed by Providence to be subservient to a much nobler one; that of the *Egyptians*, and other Heathen Nations, from their strange Ignorance, or, at best, base and unworthy Notions, of the Supreme Being; from their vain and unaccountable Confidence in their false Deities, and the

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(t) *Psalms* cxxxv. 5, and 6.

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more detestable Rites they used in their Worship of them, in order to reduce and allure them, by degrees, to the true primitive Religion, from which they were so scandalously degenerated. It was to this End that *Abraham*, of whom God made Choice to be the Reviver of it, was called out of his idolatrous Country and Kindred; and that both he, and his two immediate Descendants, *Isaac* and *Jacob*, were made to wander through several Parts of *Canaan*, and thence at last into *Egypt*, in order to sow the Seeds of it, wherever they came. It was to confirm their Faith, and encourage their Obedience, that God was pleased so frequently to appear to them, to bless and protect them in so extraordinary a Manner, and to allure them by still greater Promises. Lastly, It was with the same gracious View, that God shewed such signal Favours to, and heaped such extraordinary Blessings upon them; to the end that the People among whom they lived, seeing a Set of Strangers, who professed a Religion point-blank opposite to theirs, and which consisted chiefly in acknowledging one only Supreme Being, relying upon one only Mediator between God and Man, and professing an ut-

ter Abhorrence for all their false Gods, and their still more detestable Worship of them, to be such Favourites of Heaven, above all the rest of human Race, might the more effectually be weaned from their vain Confidence in, and execrable Worship of, their imaginary Deities; and be allured by degrees to look up to that almighty and all-beneficent Creator, as the sole Dispenser of all Blessings; for other than temporal ones they scarcely dreamed of; and such they were, of which these Worshipers of the true God appeared to them to have the far larger Share (*u*). This was visibly the Case of the *Israelites*, not only during their frequent Peregrinations through the several Kingdoms of *Canaan*, but much more so in the Land of *Egypt*; the Scene made Choice of some Ages before, by the Divine Providence, for this extraordinary Contest (*w*); and where they accordingly increased in Wealth, Number, and Strength, to such an astonishing Degree, as could not fail alarming the whole Kingdom (*x*). So that, to prevent their joining at any time with

(*u*) *Vid. int. al. Gen. xxiii. 6, & seq. xxvi. 12, & seq. xxxii. 3, & seq. 9, & seq. & alib. pass.*

(*w*) *See Genesis xv. 14, & seq.*

(*x*) *Exod. i. 7, & seq.*

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with a foreign Enemy against them, they found themselves obliged to doom them to the most inhuman Thralldom; which brought on the till then unheard of Series of Wonders, and fearful Punishments, which ended in, and hastened, their glorious Deliverance.

I have already observed, that *Egypt* was probably made Choice of by God for the Scene of this wonderful Display of his Divine Power, as it was the Parent and Nurse of all the false Deities, and superstitious Idolatry, that had been transplanted thence into a great Number of other Nations, far and near. And it might be much more so, on account of the great Name it then bore, both for being the Inventress, and for exceeding all others, in the Art of Magic, Divination, Inchanting, and other such conjuring Knowlege; which was, at that time, and long after, esteemed as the highest Pitch of Learning, and human Wisdom (y) (G); and where *Pharaoh* would

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(y) *Pliny, lib. xxx. cap. 1.*

(G) The *Egyptians* boasted, that they received this so famed Art from *Ham*, the third Son of *Noah*; and

not fail of trying the utmost that could be done by it, to invalidate the Miracles of Moses:

and that his second Son *Mizraim*, the Founder of their Nation, brought it thither (1). Others ascribe the Invention of it to their *Hermes* (2), and the Improvement of it to one of their Kings called *Nechep-sos* (3). As for the Notion, that the Angels, who became enamoured with the Daughters of Men, taught it the Antediluvian World (4), it is hardly worth confuting; the first Author who mentions it being the fabulous Author of the *Recognitions* falsely attributed to St. *Clement* (5).

What this Art consisted in, and how far it extend-

ed, is hard to say; however, that it went farther than a bare Knowledge of the various Powers of Nature, as some contend for (6), seems fully confirmed by what the Magicians of *Pharaoh* are affirmed to have performed upon this Occasion (7), as well as by the Divine Prohibition against the Practice of the several Branches of it (8), that are said to have been then in Use amongst the Heathen Nations.

Much less can this Art have consisted in a greater Skill in the Nature, Influence, and Motion, of the heavenly Bodies: For tho' they

(1) *Vid. Un. Hist. Octavo, Vol. i. p. 173. 272. iii. 373. & seq.*

(2) *Philastr. Brix. Hæres. 3.*

(3) *Auson. Epist. 19.*

(4) *Genesis vi. 2.*

(5) *Vid. Bochart. Phaleg. lib. iv. c. i.*

(6) *Vid. Corn. Agrip. Clav. Magic. Sir William Temple's Essay on the Wisdom of the Antients. Grotius; Le Clerc, & al. in Exod. vii. & seq.*

(7) *Exod. vii. 11. 22. Ch. viii. 7.*

(8) *Deuteron. xviii. 10, & seq.*

On the Egyptian MIRACLES. 95

ses. So that if his Magicians, who were commonly the Priests, and sacred Scribes, could not stand this Competition, but were so visibly defeated in every Instance of it, these

they believed them all, as well as the Elements themselves, to be endued with peculiar Intelligences; by which these Magicians pretended to perform great Feats, to foretel Events, and the like; as being appointed by the Supreme Being to govern the World (9); yet there is hardly any Person so besotted to that Art now, as to imagine, that any such extraordinary Effects could ever be produced by it. And it is most likely, that those Magicians only made use of that Pretence, the better to conceal the Means by which they did them; viz. by the Intercourse and Assistance of superior A-

gents, such as Angels and Demons; in the Knowledge of whose natural Abilities, and Manner of setting them on work, consisted the Foundation of their Art, or what we stile, in the worst Sense, *Magic*; and is that which was so severely forbid by God, under the Old (10), as well as under the New, Testament (11): For, unless we will admit the Possibility of such a Commerce with those evil Spirits, at least before the Times of the Gospel, I cannot see how we can account either for this, or for several other the like Instances, mentioned by the inspired Writers (12).

(9) Vid. Plutarch. de Defect. Orac. Cicet. de Divinat. lib. i. c. 55.

(10) Leviticus xix. 31. xx. 6. Deuteron. xviii. 10, & seq.

(11) See Burnet. Archæol. lib. i. p. 103. and the Generality of Commentators, both Jewish and Christian.

(12) Vid. Calmet's Dissert. prefixed to his Comm. on Exodus.

could

could be no room for supposing, that those of any other Nation could have been more successful in it. St. *Paul* mentions only two Magicians who withstood *Moses*; viz. *Jannes* and *Jambres* (z): These two were perhaps the two Chiefs of that Sect, and are celebrated as such by the *Talmud*, under the Names of *Juchani* and *Mamri*; and by *Pliny*, as the Founders of the magic Sect in Conjunction with *Moses* (a). The *Chaldee Paraphrast* adds, that they were the Sons of the famous *Balaam*, and that they were sent for by *Pharaoh* to oppose their Miracles to those of *Moses*; and that they perished with the rest of the *Egyptians* in the *Red Sea* (b). But, without laying too much Stress upon those Authors, we may well assure ourselves, that the *Egyptian* Monarch would spare neither Pains nor Cost, to procure the most celebrated Masters of the Art upon so singular an Emergency; nor neglect any other Precaution to prevent being imposed upon by the two *Hebrew* Chiefs. Neither can it be supposed, that the Divine Providence, which directed

(z) 2 *Tim.* iii. 8.

(a) *Lib.* xxx. c. i.

(b) *Targum Jonath.* in loc.

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directed the Whole to so wise and gracious an End, would suffer any thing to be wanting, that could leave any room to doubt of his being that only true and almighty God, whom *Pharaoh* refused to acknowledge; and that he was too righteous to punish him for his Disobedience, before he had given full Conviction of his supreme Authority over the whole Creation.

Accordingly the Contest proceeds gradually on between *Moses* and the Magicians, and in such a manner, that the former hath visibly the Advantage over the latter. Both turn their Rods into Serpents at the first Trial, and that of *Aaron* swallows up all the rest: And this perhaps is not without its particular Meaning; that as the Serpent was ever looked upon as the Emblem of Wisdom and Cunning (c), so that of the Magicians would be forced to yield to that of *Moses* (d). In the next Trial, the Waters of the *Nile*, from which the Land of *Egypt* received its Fecundity, are turned into Blood. That River supplied the Defect of Rain to them, and

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was,

(c) *Genesis* iii. 1. *Isai.* xxvii. 1. *Matth.* x. 16.

(d) *Exod.* vii. 12.

was, on that Account, worshiped by them with great Ceremony; but being now smitten by a superior Hand, is made to disgorge that Blood with which it had been stained, if not by the human Sacrifices offered up yearly to it (H), at least by that of so many Innocent

(H) The Egyptians are recorded, from the most antient Times, to have celebrated a yearly Festival, with the utmost Solemnity and Pomp, in Honour of the Nile; especially on these Years in which it swelled above its usual Mark; and as an Acknowledgement of the great Benefits they received from that River, to have sacrificed a Girl, or, according to others, a Boy and a Girl (1). And that this inhuman Custom may have been as early, if not earlier, than the Time of Moses, we have little Reason to doubt; considering what hath been lately said of their Religion and Rites being, about the same time, propagated into all the other Countries about it far and near. And what scrupulous Observers they have been of it since, we may gather from this, that it never was totally abolished, tho' perhaps suspended, when they were under the Government of foreign Princes, till the Conquest of their Country by the Turks; when the first Governor put an effectual End to it, by ordering Flowers and Branches to be offered upon the Altar, instead of those human Victims (2).

We are indeed told, that Amosis, King of that Part of Egypt called *Diospolis* (who is supposed by *Africanus* to have lived about the Time of the Exod, but in all

(1) *Herod. l. ii. Diod. Sicul. i. Lucas Voyage, tom. ii. p. 327, & seq. Thevenot. Voy. part i. cap. 45, 46.*
 (2) *Lucas, Thevenot, ub. sup.*

On the Egyptian MIRACLES. 99

innocent Infants, who had been doomed to perish in it (e). Could the Magicians

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have

(e) *Exod. i. 22.*

all Likelihood somewhat earlier), had caused the human Sacrifices, offered to *Juno Lucina* at *Heliopolis*, to be abolished (3). If so, 'tis strange that he should not have forbid this also; and much more so, that none of the *Christian* Emperors, or the *Saracens*, should abolish it, while they were Masters of it. But it must be observed, that the *Egyptians* were very tenacious of their Superstitions about the *Nile*; because on them they imagined the Rising of it to its usual Height chiefly depended; insomuch that they would doubtless have risen in Arms rather than forego them. So that if it was at any time interrupted by the Authority of those Emperors, it continued no longer so than

till they found an Opportunity of reviving it.

This was likely to have proved the Case, when their *Turkish* Governor above-mentioned first attempted to suppress it: For that River not rising on the next Year to its usual Mark, and the following one proving still worse, the People were all ready to revolt, and fear him in Pieces: Upon which he persuaded them, *Jews*, *Turks*, and *Christians*, to accompany him to a neighbouring Mountain; and there exhorted them to strive, by fervent Prayers to God, to obtain the Blessing they wanted: And on the next Morning they were congratulated with the joyful News, that the River had risen in that Night twelve full Pikes.

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(3) *Diodor. Sicul. l. i. Maneth. ap. Porphy. de abstinent. Euseb. præp. Evang. l. iv. c. 16. Plutarch. de Isid. & Osir. p. 380.*

have exerted their Art to any Purpose, it would have been shewn in the turning the Blood into Water again: But this was out of their Power; they could only add to the Plague, instead of removing it (*f*). The same happened to them in the third Trial, where their Skill could only help them to increase the Number and Stench of those vast Swarms of Frogs, which *Moses* had already brought over all the Land, and with the Stink of whose Carcases the Air was but too much infected to want any Addition.

Here then was one of their chief Deities fairly tried and condemned, in two such Instances, as might have convinced the senseless *Egyptians*, how easily that River, in which they placed so great a Confidence, and which they looked upon as one of their greatest

(*f*) *Exod. vii. 21, & seq.*

It continued doing so during the rest of the time; and that Year was blessed with such extraordinary Plenty, that whenever its Waters are like to fail,

they have had ever since recourse to that Mountain, and to their Prayers, instead of their inhuman Sacrifices (4).

(4) *Lucas, Thevenot. ub. sup.*

On the Egyptian MIRACLES. 101

greatest Blessings, could be turned into the greatest Curse, by the bare Stroke of the miraculous Rod ; and that nothing but the Divine Power could restore it to its native Usefulness and Fecundity (g) ; whilst the Art of the Magicians here proved vain and ineffectual.

The fourth Trial was that of the Lice ; a Trial, to all Appearance, as easy, if not more so, to be imitated, than any of the former ; but in which, however, they are so unexpectedly foiled, that they make no Difficulty to own their Impotence and Disappointment to be the Effect of a Divine Power (h). Hence some Divines have been induced to believe, that this small Vermin was a new Kind of Creature, and out of the Power of any but God to produce ; whereas the Miracle here chiefly consisted in restraining the Power of those Magicians from working a Miracle, every whit as easy as those they had done before ; and thereby forcing them to acknowledge that superior Power, or, as they expressed it to the King, the Finger of God, which

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was

(g) *Exod. viii. 1, & seq.*

(h) *Ibid. Verse 19.*

was the Cause of it ; by which both he and they might see, that what they had hitherto performed was chiefly owing to his Divine Permission, beyond which they found it impossible to go. And this the Magicians so readily acknowledged, that we do not find, that the King made any farther Trial of their Art, or that they intermeddled any farther in the Contest.

However, as *Pharaoh's* Magicians appeared so little affected by the Advantage which *Moses* had hitherto gain'd over them in it, that there is Reason to think he did not believe them, if he did not indeed suspect them to have been privately drawn in to act in concert with the two *Hebrew* Chiefs, it was requisite that the succeeding Plagues should be of a more pungent and awakening Nature ; and, by falling on the Magicians, as well as the rest of the People, remove all possible Suspicion of any latent Juggle or Confederacy. Accordingly the next was that of the Swarm of Flies, which, by their poisonous Sting, so terribly annoyed both Man and Beast, that the Air was now as much infected with them, as the Earth and Water had been by the
5 Frogs,

Frogs, and the River turned into Blood (i). But what was still more singular and wonderful in this new one was, that those little poisonous Insects were directed to make a Difference between the Land of *Egypt*, and the Canton of *Goshen*; so that they had no more Power to annoy an *Israelite*, than to spare an *Egyptian*: And this so plainly shewed them to be sent by an angry God, and not by Chance or Art, that *Pharaoh*, unable to resist such an Evidence, consents to let *Israel* go and sacrifice to their God, if he will but vouchsafe to rid him of this Plague (k); tho' he continues still hardened, as soon as it is removed. And here I cannot but observe, once for all, that God not only made the same remarkable Difference between the *Israelites* and *Egyptians*, in the Murrain of Beasts, in the Boils and Blains, which affected the very Magicians themselves, as well as the King and People; but likewise set the Space of a Day between the Message and the Plague, as well as between the Promise and the Removing. In the first it is said always, *To-morrow the Lord will bring*

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(i) *Exod. viii. 20, & seq.*

(k) *Ibid. Verse 28.*

it to pass; and in the other it is said, *To-morrow I will intreat the Lord, and he shall remove it.* The Intent of which seems plainly to give them Time to apply to those false Deities, in whom they put so much Confidence, and try whether any of them were able, either to avert the threatened Judgment, or to remove it when inflicted: For if none of them could do either of these, what could be a greater Demonstration, that all the Power that was falsely attributed to them was mere Delusion, and that consequently there was no other God in Heaven, or on Earth, except the Lord *Jehovah*? This *Pharaoh* could not but be deeply sensible of; but the Thoughts of dismissing so many Myriads of useful Slaves, made still a much stronger Impression upon him; and, tho' extremely desirous to have each Plague removed from him, yet he would willingly purchase the Blessing at the cheapest Rate. At first he tells them plainly they shall not go; he next gives them Leave to go and sacrifice, so it be done within his Dominions (1); in the next, they may go into the Wilderness, but not too far

(1) *Exod. viii. 25.*

far off (*m*); by-and-by the Men may go, so they leave their Young ones and Cattle behind (*n*); at last they may all go, young and old, provided their numerous Herds stay behind (*o*); neither can he be prevail'd upon to condescend so far to their Desire, till earnestly solicited to it by his Servants, and reminded of the deplorable Condition *Egypt* was now reduc'd to (*p*) thro' his Obstinacy. And great Reason they had to do so, considering that all the Fish was destroy'd by the first Plague (*q*); the Cattle and Fruits by the Murrain and Hail (*r*); the Corn by the Locusts (*s*); and the Fruits and Leaves by the same Vermin, which now covered the whole Face of the desolate Earth, in such prodigious Swarms, that they darkened the very Air (*t*); no Part of that unhappy Kingdom having escaped the Effects of those dreadful Plagues, but the Land of *Goshen*, where the *Israelites* dwelt (*u*).

By

(*m*) *Exod. viii. 28.*

(*n*) *Ibid. x. 9, & seq.*

(*o*) *Ibid. Verse 24.*

(*p*) *Ibid. Verse 7.*

(*q*) *Ibid. vii. 21.*

(*r*) *Ibid. ix. 1, & seq. 22, & seq.*

(*s*) *Ibid. x. 4, & seq.*

(*t*) *Ibid. Verse 15, & seq.*

(*u*) *Ibid. ix. 6. 16. & alib. pass.*

By this time, therefore, the Egyptians, whom we may reasonably suppose to have applied in vain to all their fancied Deities for Help, must be fully convinced of their Impotence, and their own Stupidity, in placing any Confidence in them; as well as of the Vanity of their so much boasted Skill in the magic Art, &c. all which had so egregiously failed them in this important Contest. Neither can we well question but Pharaoh's Confession came from his Heart, when he said to Moses, *I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you—Intreat the Lord for me, that he may remove this only one deadly Plague more from me, and I will dismiss you* (w). But what appears indeed almost incredible, is, that he should suffer his Remorse to be blown away, as it were, by the same Wind that drove the destructive Locusts into the Sea (x). But here it must be remembered, that tho' the Confession was the Effect of a full Conviction; yet the Promise being rather extorted from him by the present Smart, the one was no sooner removed, than the

(w) *Exod. x. 16, & seq.*

(x) *Ibid. Verse 19, & seq.*

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the other must of course have proved abortive, till roused again by a fresh and more efficacious Stroke.

Accordingly, the very next proves a more dreadful and awakening one than any of the former; as it extended itself beyond the four Elements, even to the celestial Bodies, and more particularly over the two grand Luminaries, which were worshiped by the Egyptians as the chief and most powerful of all their Deities, and as the immediate Vicegerents of their great *Eneph*, or supreme Being (y). For tho' their Course was neither stopped nor retarded, as it was afterwards in *Josbua's* Time (z); yet to be on the sudden deprived of their chearful Light; to be doomed to a strange and dismal Night, not only six times as long as the common ones, but which was made still more so, by the Horror that reigned every-where, must appear to them more extraordinary and dreadful, than if they had stood still over their Heads; because it was not now a bare Privation of Light, but a

Darkness

(y) See before, page 58 (B).

(z) *Josbua* x. 12, & seq.

Darkness that might be felt (a) ; and that, in such a Degree, that they had neither Power nor Will to stir out of their Places: So that being left wholly to the Horror of their Thoughts, they either imagined those Luminaries, together with the whole Train of celestial Bodies, to be totally extinguished ; or that the whole Creation was returning to its original *Chaos*. Now they had Leisure to reflect upon all the former Punishments they had undergone, and to think, with awful Dread, how punctually the Lord God of the *Hebrews* had fulfilled all that *Moses* had foretold to them ; and how ineffectual all their Addresses to their numerous Deities had been, towards averting or removing any of his Punishments. They are now convinced, to their Cost, that this Lord is, as *Moses* truly said, the only supreme Being, to whose irresistible Will all things are forced to submit ; but dare not apply to him for Mercy, for fear of incensing his Anger still more against them. The only Remedy that *Pharaoh* and his People can think of, to support them under their heavy Load of Dread, is to endeavour to appease it, both by an immediate Compliance

(a) *Exod. x. 21, & seq.*

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Compliance with his Command, and by the most earnest Intreaties, and generous Presents, to prevail upon the *Israelites*, to intercede for them, and to obtain them that Pardon from God, which they dared not ask for themselves.

This, at least, appears by the Sequel, to have been the Result of *Pharaoh's* moody Thoughts, during the Time of this long and dreadful Night. He had indeed more than once intreated *Moses* and *Aaron* to intercede with God for him (*b*); but we do not find, that he ever ventured to address himself to him; for he had too often prevaricated with him, to hope that his Prayers could meet with Acceptance; and therefore chose to rely on those of two such powerful and tried Advocates, as *Moses* and *Aaron*, for an effectual Deliverance. In this Perplexity both he and his People are joyfully surprised with the Return of the wished for Light; and *Moses* and *Aaron* are once more sent for, to be informed, that he, and his whole Nation, both small and great, are at full Liberty to depart; only their Cattle are to stay behind, as a Security for their Return. But upon
their

(*b*) *Vid. int. al. Exod. ix. 28, &c. x. 16, 17.*

their absolute Refusal to comply with this last Condition, for which they gave him a sufficient Reason (c), the haughty Monarch falls into an indecent Fury with them; orders them to be gone, and, under Pain of Death, never to see his Face more: And *Moses* retires from him, with a Promise to comply with his Command (d).

Thus far the Competition had been carried on, with the most evident and sensible Disadvantage to the *Egyptians* in every Instance; either with respect to their boasted magic Art, or to the pretended Power of all their Deities. There is not now the least room left to doubt of the Lord God of the *Israelites* being the only supreme and absolute Governor of All; and every Stroke of his irresistible Arm falls heavier and heavier on that infatuated and idolatrous Nation; and yet *Pharaoh* refuses to yield, and will rather run the Risque of a new and severer Judgment, than let the *Israelites* take their Cattle with them. And no Wonder he should still continue obstinate, seeing the greatest of all his

(c) *Exod. x. 25.*

(d) *Ibid. Verses 28, 29.*

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his Crimes remained unpunished by the righteous Judge of Heaven and Earth; namely, the Murder of so many innocent *Hebrews*, whom the Tyrant had caused to be destroyed as soon as born; and which was to be expiated now by the Destruction of all the *Egyptian* First-born. For as the Dooming of those Innocents to immediate Death, was the Completion of the *Israelitish* Thralldom and Misery, and that which brought on their Deliverance; so the miraculous Slaughter of the First-born was to give the final Stroke to the *Egyptian* Tyranny, and hasten the total Subversion of *Pharaoh*, and his Host, which happened soon after. And the same Divine Providence, which had so wonderfully brought them into this Country, and hard Bondage, shall now, the Time prescribed for it being fully come (e), by this last Display of his almighty Power, at once fulfil his never-failing Promise; and, by the Deliverance of his chosen People from their Thralldom, and the just Punishment of their Oppressors, manifest himself, both to them, and all the Earth, to be the true and only Lord and Governor of the Universe, exclusive of all other pretended Deities.

(e) *Genesis* xv. 13—16.

Deities of the Heathen World ; which was the main Scope and Design of this whole miraculous Transaction (f).

It is not easy to determine, whether this Message of the Death of the First-born was delivered to *Pharaoh* at the last-mentioned Interview which *Moses* had with him, immediately after the three Days Darkness, or at any time after : The Generality of the *Jews*, and not a few *Christians*, are for the former, as I have already hinted (g). Others think, from the Order in which the inspired Historian relates them (h), that it was a new one, with which *Moses* was forced to comply, tho' he had been so severely forbid to see his Face ; it being of such a Nature, as must make him overlook all the Threatening, and over-rule his own Promise to that haughty Monarch. However that be, we have no Reason to doubt, but it was openly delivered to him in its full Extent ; seeing it was decreed by the Divine Providence, that he should be warned of it ; and that it was to be the concluding

(f) See before, Page 56, & seq.

(g) See before, Page 85, Note (F)

(h) Exod. xi. 4, & seq.

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cluding Stroke of the Divine Vengeance, in case he proved obstinate and disobedient (i). So that in this extraordinary Trial between the Almighty God of the *Hebrews*, and the pretended Deities of *Egypt*, all the former Judgments, down to the three Days dreadful Darkness, may be looked upon as so many credible Witnesses for the former; against whose plain Evidence nothing of Weight had been offered by the latter: Yet this last was to be the most convincing and irrefragable of all, and that in the following respects; viz.

1st, Because nothing less than an almighty and unerring Hand could direct the Destroyer, whether Angel, or whatever other Instrument, was made use of on this dreadful Occasion, to the only First-born of every Condition and Sex, from the highest Prince of the Royal Family, to the meanest Female Slave, doomed to the lowest Degree of Servitude, and downwards to the most abject Animal (k).

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2^{dly},

(i) *Exod.* iv. 23.

(k) *Ibid.* xi. 5, & seq. xii. 12.

2dly, Because nothing less than such a powerful and unerring Hand could preserve those that belonged to the *Israelitish* Nation from sharing in the same dreadful Fate. So that whilst the whole Land of *Egypt* was filled with the utmost Confusion, and universal Grief, Horror, and Dread, there being no House in it that had not one dead Person within it, the Land of *Goshen* enjoyed the most profound Peace; and the Avenue to each House and Family was made safe and impassable to the common Destroyer, by the Blood of the Paschal Lamb (1).

3dly, This Destruction was an infallible Proof, both of the sovereign Power of the God of the *Hebrews*, and of the Vanity of the *Egyptian* Deities; because in this, and all other Nations, the Priesthood and Primogeniture were always joined together: So that the First-born of every Family was always the Priest of those Deities which were the Object of their Worship (1); and, being look'd

(1) *Exod.* xii. 13.

(1) That, during the patriarchal Oeconomy, the First-born, or Heads of every Family, were also the Priests

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look'd upon as more immediately related to them than the Laity, must be of course the

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more

Priests of it, is too plain to need any Proof: From which we may reasonably infer, that this Hierarchy was of Divine Appointment. *Noah*, as such, sacrificed to God for himself, and the small Remains that were saved with him in the Ark (1). *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, did the same in their respective Families, after they became their Heads: And so doubtless did the twelve Sons of *Jacob*, after they were parted from him; though it is hardly to be doubted but that he still retained a kind of supreme Authority over them, in this, as well as in his civil Capacity, whilst he lived; and which descended after his Death to his eldest Son, unless he were on some account disqualified for it, as *Reuben* was, who forfeited both

the Priesthood and Primogeniture, by his incestuous Commerce with his Father's Concubine (2).

It is therefore more reasonable to suppose, that this Hierarchy, as the most rational, convenient, and primitive, was continued among the other Descendants of *Noah*; and that *Mizraim*, the first Peopler of *Egypt*, introduced it thither; than that they should leave the Choice of their Priests to the capricious Votes of the People, or to the Nomination of the Heads of them. Neither is it probable, that these would easily give up such a choice Prerogative, which raised them to the highest Rank and Power, next to their Monarchs; and intitled them to so great a Share in the Administration with them: Which

Prerogative,

(1) *Genesis* viii. 20. xii. 7, & seq. xv. 9, & seq. xxv. 31, & seq. xxxiii. 19, 20. xxxv. 1, & seq. & alib. pass.

(2) *Genesis* xxxv. 22. xlix. 3, & seq.

more peculiar Objects of their Care and Concern; which, if they had had any of that Power that was attributed to them, they must, on this Occasion, have exerted to the utmost, in their Preservation from the threatened Doom. The Contest here is no less than between the First-born of *Jehovah*, the God of the *Hebrews*, and those of the *Egyptian* Deities: But if, after so fair and various a Trial, it plainly appears, that the former can do

Prerogative, *Herodotus* tells us (3), passed from the Father to the eldest Son; that is, according as a learned modern Author understands it; not the *παῖδες*, as a noble Author would represent it, intimating thereby, that all the Sons of a Priest were obliged to follow their Father's Calling (4); but to the *παῖς*, or eldest Son; which was exactly according to the primitive divine Institution (5). But that Notion is by far too restrained here, and

clashes too palpably with *Moses's* Account, who tells us, that there was not an House in which there was not one dead (6). So that we must understand him to mean no less than the First-born or Head of every Family; who, though subordinate to the higher Class of the Priesthood, yet were intitled to perform the Priestly Functions within their own inferior Precinct or Families; as I hinted at the Beginning of this Note.

(3) *Lib. ii. c. 37.*

(4) *Lord Shaftesbury's Characterist.*

(5) *See Shuckford. Connec. l. vi. p. 107, & seq.*

(6) *Exod. xii. 30.*

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do all things in favour of his own, and the latter prove unable to stir an Hand for the Preservation of theirs from such a dreadful and universal Ruin, what can be a more irrefragable Demonstration of the Omnipotence and Sovereignty of the one, and the Impotence and Vanity of the other? Here is no Need of any Depth of Learning or Sagacity to decide the Point; a common Share of unbiassed Reason will easily enable a Man to judge in so plain a Case; and so did the *Egyptians* accordingly, when they cried out, *We be all dead Men (m)*. And well they might fear to share in the same Fate; for if those who were the Guardians of their Religion, the Fountain of all Learning, Counsel, Power, and, as the Psalmist styles them, *Reshith lecol Onam, The Chief of all their Strength (n)*, could not obtain a Safeguard from any of their Deities, against the Executioner of the Divine Vengeance, what could they expect but to be involved in the same Destruction, unless they could happily prevent it by the immediate Dismission of his People, and by their earnest Intreaties, as well as by their

(m) *Exod. xii. 33.*

(n) *Psalms cv. 36.*

their Gifts and Presents, to hasten their Departure, and obtain their Prayers for them?

But, 4^{thly}, The Death of the *Egyptian* First-born was no less an Evidence of God's supreme Goodness and Justice, than of his Omnipotence, and absolute Sovereignty: For since *Egypt* was now become ripe, upon so many accounts, for Punishment, and for such an exemplary one as should convince both its Inhabitants, and all other Nations that heard of it, of the over-ruling Power of the great *Jehovah*, and of the Impotence and Vanity of the *Egyptian* Deities; what could be a more pregnant Proof of his Mercy and Justice, than the sparing the guiltless and misguided Laity, and causing the Effects of his Anger to fall only on their miscreant Guides; who, instead of preserving, had, for the most base and selfish Ends, not barely corrupted, but in a great measure obliterated, the old patriarchal Religion; and substituted to it the impious, as well as monstrous, Worship of such a vast Variety of false Deities; and with it the most unnatural and abominable Rites and Superstitions; which, as I observed

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served before (o), had spread themselves in most Countries about them?

However, this last Stroke hath the desired Effect; and the *Egyptians* find themselves every-where under so dreadful a Consternation, that they are now more pressing for the *Israelites* to be gone, than ever they were willing to obtain them (p): They even bribe them with large Presents to go away as Conquerors, whom they had till now detained as Slaves. *Israel* now triumphs, as the First-born of the almighty *Jehovah*; whilst *Egypt*, by the sudden and direful Catastrophe of its own, experimentally feels, by this one Stroke, the Vanity and Impotence of its own boasted Gods, and the irresistible Power of that of the *Hebrews* (q). And, what is still more dreadful, they see themselves so far exposed, naked and defenceless, to the Effects of his Resentment, for their tyrannical Treatment of them, that they think neither Gold, nor Silver, nor Jewels, too great a Price to recompense their former Evils, and hasten

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(o) See before, Page 63, & seq.

(p) *Exod.* xii. 31, & seq.

(q) *Wisdom* xix. 13, & seq.

hasten their Departure. Even *Pbaraoh*, till now unmov'd at all the other Plagues which his stubborn Heart had brought upon his Country, is now forced to intreat them to be gone, and to become Intercessors for him to that supreme Deity, which he had hitherto refused to acknowledge (r).

And now we are come to the Conclusion of this grand and celebrated Contest between the Lord God of the *Hebrews*, and the false Deities of the *Egyptians*; in which the latter having undergone a great Variety of signal Trials, and been plainly defeated in every one, this last and most remarkable of all, of the Death of the First-born, is brought on as the finishing Blow; which was reserved as the final Execution of those divine Judgments, which his unerring Word had pronounced against the *Egyptian* Gods; and that in such a conspicuous manner, that the most zealous Votaries should be forced at once to acknowledge the Justice of them, and the Sense they had of his almighty Power, by a ready

(r) Confer *Exod.* v. 2. and xii. 31, 32.

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ready Compliance with his divine Commands (s). There remained one thing more to be done to crown this wonderful Transaction; and that was, to have it recorded in such indelible Characters, that the latest Posterity might have all the moral Certainty of its Truth and Reality, that the Nature of it could possibly admit of. And to this end it was that God ordained the grand Festival of the Passover, or Eating of the Paschal Lamb, to be yearly celebrated; and commanded moreover all the first-born Males, both of Man and Beast, to be sanctified to him; and to be severally redeemed; the former with the Price of five Shekels, as soon as they were thirty Days old (t); and the latter by some settled Equivalent (u). Which two Institutions were the most proper to perpetuate the Memory of it to future Ages (w), as long as the *Hebrew Nation* subsisted; which it hath done ever since, in so astonishing a manner, in spite of all their several Captivities, cruel Persecutions,

(s) *Exod.* vi. 1, & seq.

(t) *Numb.* xviii. 16.

(u) *Exod.* xii. 2, & seq. xiii. 2, & seq. xxxiv. 19, & seq. *Levit.* xxvii. 26, & seq. & alib. pass.

(w) See *Lesley's Method with the Deists.*

Persecutions, and other very many Disadvantages, and more particularly since their last and total Dispersion, after the Destruction of their City and Temple by *Titus*, as leaves one no room to doubt, but that the Divine Providence hath all along preserved them, thro' so long a Series of Ages and Changes, for some wise and important Ends; which will be made manifest in their own due time (x). For, as the Apostle justly observes, if the Fall and Diminishing of them be the Riches of the (converted *Gentile*) World, how much more their Fulness (y)? And if the Casting off of them be the Reconciling of the World, what shall the Receiving of them be, but Life from the Dead? But this being a Subject that is foreign to the present Point, and hath been already handled by so many learned Pens, I willingly pass it by. And for the same Reason it is, that I have forborn entring into the grand and principal View of the Divine Providence, in this miraculous Deliverance of the *Israelites*; as it was designed to typify to us that much nobler one which was to be wrought, and was accordingly

(x) See a *Treatise of the Restoration of Israel*, addressed to the Jews, An. 1747.

(y) *Rom. xi. 12. 15. 26, & seq.*

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cordingly so, by the Divine Redeemer of Mankind, who is stiled the only First-born of every Creature (z), and First-begotten of the Dead (a); yet, as the First-born of his Virgin Mother (K), condescended to be redeemed according to the Law above-mentioned (b). For though in this respect the infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, are still more visibly and wonderfully display'd, in the conducting of such Variety of disparate Means to that one glorious End; yet that is a Point which doth not concern the Question about the true Meaning of the Judgments executed by him on the Egyptian Gods; which I hope I have sufficiently shewn, by this time, to be no other than the irrefragable

(z) *Calos. i. 15.*

(a) *Revel. i. 5.*

(b) *Luke ii. 22.*

(K) It is rightly observed, by some antient Fathers, that Christ was the only First-born, of whom it could be truly said, according to the Letter of the

Mosaic Law, that he opened his Mother's Womb; because it was the only one that was unbroken and untouched by natural Coition (1).

(1) *Origen Homil. 14. in Luc. i. Tertul. de carn. Christ. c. 23. Ambros. in Luc. ii. 56. Hieron. Theophil. & al.*

gible Evidence given through the Series of the ten Plagues, inflicted on their senseless Votaries, of their being no other than imaginary and false Deities, and that he alone was the true and only supreme Governor of Heaven and Earth.

But here I know not whether I shall not be thought guilty of a considerable Omission, in not joining to the foregoing ten Plagues, that which was the last, and most dreadful, as well as the most wonderful of all, the miraculous Passage of the *Israelites* through the *Red Sea*, and the total Destruction of *Pharaoh* and his Host in it (c); especially as the most miraculous Part of it, the Dividing of its Waves on each Side (d), hath been so boldly attacked by very learned Men, both *Jews* and *Christians*; and attempted to be accounted for in a natural Way, so discreditable to the Account given us by the sacred Historian (L), and other

(c) *Exod.* xiv. *pass.*

(d) *Vid. int. al. Ps.* lxxviii. 13. cxxxvi. 13, 14. *Isai.* lxiii. 12, 13. *Habak.* iii. 15. & *al.*

(L) It is plain from *Moses* gives us of this the whole Account which Transaction, that it could be

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other inspired Writers, who have made mention of that extraordinary Transaction; as if the Whole of it consisted in *Moses's* having gained a greater Insight into the Ebbing and Flowing of that Sea than the *Egyptians*, and choosing

be no other than a very miraculous one (1). So that one would wonder how it should come into the Heads of learned Men, who acknowledge his divine Authority, to represent it in a manner so incompatible with it, and pretend that he only coasted along some Part of the Sea, or, at most, crossed some narrow Nook of it, at a time when he knew it to be low Water; whilst the *Egyptians*, ignorant of that Circumstance, and venturing to follow the same Tract, were overwhelmed by the Waves at the Return of the Tide. A Notion, which, we are told by an antient Writer (2), went current with the *Memphitish* Priests;

whilst those of *Heliopolis* allowed that Fact to be altogether supernatural. And so certainly must every thinking Man, that considers the Impossibility of *Moses's* leading such a numerous Host, consisting of little less than three Millions, besides a vast Quantity of heavy Luggage, across the smallest Arm of the Sea, in so short a time as that between low Water and the Return of the Tide. But for a farther Confutation of that and other Absurdities, that attend that wild Supposition, I shall refer the Reader to the Universal History, above-quoted, where that whole Transaction is set in the fairest Light (3).

(1) *Exod.* xiv. 14, & seq.

(2) *Aristophan. ap. Euseb. præp. Evang.* l. iv. c. 27.

(3) *Un. Hist. fol. vol. i. ch. vii. sect. 6, ad fin. & 8vo. vol. iii. p. 391, & seq.*

choosing the critical Time of its low Water to cross it at some narrow Nook. But, besides that this wild Notion hath been fully confuted, and the Impossibility of such a Supposition fairly demonstrated, by abler Pens, to which I willingly refer your Opponent (e); I cannot look upon that signal Punishment as a Part of the Judgment denounced against, and executed upon, the *Egyptian* Gods, in the Sense I have taken that Phrase in; their Cause having already been determined by the Death of the First-born, in such a manner, as had effectually convinced *Pharaoh*, and his Court, of the Vanity and Impotence of those pretended Deities: The Misfortune was, that their Conviction was so easily overbalanced by their Regret of parting with so many Myriads of useful Hands, such numberless Herds of Cattle, and so much of other Wealth, all at once, that his Avarice and Ambition gets the better of his Reason; and his Eagerness to bring them back permits not him to reflect on the Danger of the Attempt, till he and his Host

are

(e) See, among others on that Subject, *Un. Hist. fol. vol. i. ch. vii. sect. 6, ad fin. & 8vo. Edit. vol. iii. p. 392, & seq. sub Not.*

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are all swallowed up in one common Ruin. So that this last Punishment is not inflicted upon them for their Unbelief, or refusing to acknowledge the all-powerful God of the *Hebrews*; but for daring to disobey him, in spite of all the former and severe Instances he had so lately given of his sovereign Authority over them, and all the World.

However that be, it cannot but be confessed, that this last miraculous Catastrophe was a most convincing Proof, both to the surviving *Egyptians*, and to all the other Nations round about, of the Falshood of their Religion; which had hitherto so fatally misled them from the Knowledge and Worship of that one supreme and almighty Being, into a Belief and Confidence in their own respective imaginary Deities. This is elegantly expressed by *Moses*, in that excellent Poem, which he composed upon this Occasion, to be sung by the *Israelitish* Host: *The People shall hear of it, and be dismayed: Fear shall seize on the Inhabitants of Palestine: The Dukes of Edom shall be amazed: Terror shall seize on the mighty Men of Moab; and all the Inhabitants*

of Canaan *shall melt away* (f). All which was punctually verified by the Sequel (g). And indeed, how could they be otherwise than dismayed, to the last degree, when they heard of this signal Overthrow? And to what less than an almighty Power could they ascribe it, considering the vast Disparity between the Pursued and the Pursuer? The former an unwieldy Body of fugitive, unarmed Slaves; unused to War, and ready to die with Fear at the Sight of a merciless Sea before, and an inexorable Enemy behind: The latter a numerous Host of experienced Warriors, armed *Cap-à-pé*, and with such Quantities of Horse and Foot, as make them already sure of Victory: And yet to find the one safely conveyed over, thro' the yielding Waves; and the others swallowed up to a Man by them, and thrown up, by the next Tide, to the opposite Shore.

From what had hitherto been transacted, both in *Egypt*, and last of all at the *Red Sea*, the *Canaanites*, and other Nations, who worshipped

(f) *Exod. xv. 14, & seq.*

(g) *Vid. int. al. Deut. ii. 25. Josh. ii. 9, & seq. & alib. pass.*

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shipped the like false Deities, had all the Reason in the World to conclude, that theirs would no more be able to stand the Trial with the Lord God of *Israel*, than those of *Egypt* had done.

However, that there might be no Want either of Proofs to convince them of his being the true and only supreme Being, or of Motives to induce them to comply with his gracious Design, and to renounce all future Confidence in their Idols, and false Gods, and to worship and trust in him alone; he is pleased to work as great, unheard of, Wonders among them, by the Hand of his new Servant *Joshua*, as he had done by that of *Moses* in *Egypt*; and at the same time orders him to proclaim an universal Peace and Amnesty to as many of them as should accept it upon those Terms (M), and utter Destruction to all Recusants.

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(M) That is, the renouncing all Idolatry, and embracing the pure, ancient, patriarchal Religion,

which we have already described elsewhere (1), and by which the *Talmudists* and *Jewish* Rabbins understand

(1) See the Preface, and p. 90, & seq.

I am sensible, that there is some Difficulty to reconcile this with the positive Anathema which God had pronounced against seven of those *Canaanitish* Nations (1); who must therefore be supposed to have been excluded from the Benefit of the one, and irrecoverably

(1) *Deut. vii. 2. 26. xx. 17, & alib. pass.*

stand the seven Precepts pretended to have been given to *Noah* after the Flood; viz. 1. To abstain from Idolatry. 2. From Blasphemy. 3. From Murder. 4. From Adultery. 5. From Theft. 6. From Blood, and things strangled. And, 7. To appoint proper Judges to maintain the Execution of those Laws (2). But as neither the *Chaldee* Paraphrast, nor *Josephus*, nor *Philo*, among the *Jews*; nor *Origen*, or *St. Jerom*, among the *Fathers*; make mention of them; their pretended Antiquity is much called in question. And I should rather think, with the judicious *Maimon*. (3) that the six first, being the Substance of the Decalogue, or natural Religion, were given to *Adam*, and the seventh to *Noah* (4); either as a Check to all kind of Cruelty (5), or perhaps rather as an Acknowledgement, that our Right to feed upon living Creatures is not derived to us from Nature, but from God's free Permission.

(2) *Gemar. Babyl. lib. Sanhedr. Rabbin. fer. omn. in Gen. viii. Vid. & Selden de Jur. Nat. & Gent. lib. i. c. ult.*

(3) *Yad. Chazak. Sepher Melakim, c. 9.*

(4) *Cumberland de Leg. Patriarch. printed in his Origines antiquissimæ.*

(5) *Vid. Arnob. cont. Gent. lib. v.*

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ably involved in the Sentence of the other; on account of their consummate Wickedness above all the rest (*m*). But even this Exclusion, *a priori*, might be justly decreed against them by God, from a Prescience that they would infallibly refuse his more peaceful Offers, out of an invincible Reluctance to exchange their Idolatries, and impious Superstitions, for his more pure and rational Worship; upon which Conditions only they were to be admitted to the Benefit of them. So that this Exception, with respect to them, might mean no more than this: As for these seven Nations, who, notwithstanding I have in Mercy spared hitherto, have now filled the Measure of their Iniquity, by the most horrid and abominable Superstitions; you may spare all farther Offers of Pardon, and act against them, as if they had actually rejected them; because I well know, that they are determined to do so, and are therefore unworthy of any farther Invitation or Encouragement. The Event did sufficiently justify it; and the Confederacy which they unanimously entered into, not only against *Joshua*, but against the *Gibeonites*, who, tho' included in the same

K 2

Anathema,

(*m*) See *Genesis* xv. 16.

Anathema, had, by a lucky Stratagem, obtained an Alliance with him; plainly shews how fully determined they were against listening to any Offers from the *Israelites*; and to hazard their All, rather than suffer the *Gibeonites* to enjoy the Benefit of their new Alliance (*n*). From this remarkable Instance I would observe further, that neither *Joshua*, nor the grand Council of the *Hebrews*, looked upon the divine Interdict above-mentioned to have been of so absolute a Nature, as to supersede the Oath they had sworn to their new Allies; for in such a Case *Eleazar*, the then High-Priest, must have been obliged to absolve them from it, as invalid and unlawful: At least they could never have looked upon it to be so binding, as to oblige them to take up Arms in their Defence, when they found them on the Eve of falling a Sacrifice to the Resentment of the five confederate Kings (*o*). Whereas *Joshua* really shewed a quite contrary Behaviour towards them; and, upon the first News of their imminent Danger, marches at the Head of his Army that whole Night, and on the next Morning falls upon

(*n*) See *Josh. ch. ix. & x. pass.*

(*o*) *Ibid. x. 5, & seq.*

upon the Enemy with his usual Bravery; and slack not his Pursuit of them, till he hath utterly destroyed them. And what is still more remarkable, God is so far from reproving him for it, that he encourages him to go on, with the Promise of a complete, and even a miraculous, Victory (p). It is true indeed, that the Benefit the *Gibeonites* received from this Alliance was a very small one; since they only saved their Lives, to be doomed to perpetual Servitude: But this was, as *Joshua* told them (q), inflicted on them, on account of the fraudulent Stratagem by which they over-reach'd him; which, however, was made the lighter, and more honourable, in that they were made to attend, not on the *Israelites*, but on the Service of their God; whereby they still continued as one Body or Nation: And it is not improbable, that the noble Confession they made to the Congregation of *Israel* (r), might be the main Motive of it.

K 3

Thus

(p) *Joshua* x. 8. 11, & seq.

(q) *Josh.* ix. 22, 23.

(r) *Ibid.* Verses 9, 10. & 24.

Thus far went the Divine Interdict against the seven Nations above-mentioned. But as to the rest of the People to be conquered, they were to be treated in a different manner, and to have the Offers of Peace, on the Conditions lately mentioned, sent to every City; which if accepted, they became tributary; and, in all other respects, were left to enjoy their Freedom and Laws: But if rejected, a second Offer was sent to them, to depart quietly and unmolested, whithersoever they would: But if this last was still refused, then they were at Liberty to begin Hostilities against them; and, when subdued, to kill every Man, and seize on their Women, Children, and Cattle, as their Spoil (s). But in no case were the *Israelites* to suffer them to continue in their old Idolatry; but were ordered to destroy their Idols, Altars, Groves, &c. Neither were they permitted to contract any kind of Affinity with them, lest they should be enticed by it to the Worship of their false Deities.

However,

(s) *Deut. xx. 10, & seq. Vid. Maimon. in loc. R., Sam. Nachmanid. in Deut. xx. 10, &c.*

However, in all the various Exploits which they were to go through, the Divine Providence took special Care, that they should not appear to the *Canaanites* like those vast Herds of *Celtes*, *Scythians*, and other Invaders, who acknowledged no other Right than that of the strongest Arm; and alleged that, as a sufficient Indication, that the Gods were on their Side, and favoured their Invasions of other Peoples Property. All *Canaan* was so fully apprised of all the Wonders which God had wrought, both in *Egypt*, on the *Red Sea*, and in the Wilderness, in their Favour (t), that the stoutest Inhabitants in it were quite overcome with Dread and Despair, and thought on nothing but how to sell their Lives and Lands as dear as they could, to their invincible Enemies. But lest they should imagine the Report of them to have been exaggerated, God vouchsafes to signalize their first Entrance into their Borders with such new and surprising ones, as shall leave them no room to doubt of their being assisted, in the Conquest of that Land,

K 4

by

(t) *Joshua* ii, 9, & seq. v. 1, & seq. ix. 9, 10, & alib. pass.

by such an all-powerful Hand, as all the *Canaanitish* Deities were not able to repel.

He begins with the miraculous Division of the Waters of *Jordan*, at a Season when they were wont to overflow the Land a great way on each Side (N); and opening a Passage through

(N) It is plain, whatever modern Travellers say of the present Shallowness and Narrowness of the *Jordan* (1), whether through its sinking its Bed deeper, or any other common Change made in it, by Length of Time, that it was formerly a large and considerable River, even in the Time of *Pliny* and *Strabo* (2); and that it was fordable only at some few Places, probably made so by Art (3): And that it overflowed its Banks for-

merly, about the Time of Barley-Harvest, we are assured of, not only by the Book of *Joshua*, but by some other Places of Holy Writ (4). And Mr. *Maundrel* observed, that the Descent, from its uttermost Bank to its present Chancel, was about a Furlong; tho' at the time of his viewing it, which was at the latter End of *March*, the usual Season of its overflowing in former times, it ran about two Yards below the Brink of its Chancel.

(1) *Vid. Sandys, Thevenot, La Rocque, Pedro de la Valle, Maundrel, & al.*

(2) *Plin. N. Hist. l. v. c. 19. Strab. Geogr. lib. xvi. p. 755.*

(3) *Comp. Josh. ii. 22, & seq. Judg. iii. 28. xii. 5. 2 Kings ii. 6, & seq.*

(4) *Comp. Josh. iii. 15. iv. 18. 1 Chron. xii. 15. Jerem. xlix. 19. l. 44. Eccclus. xxiv. 26.*

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through it, wide enough for their numerous Host to go over it in one Day (*u*). In Memory of which wonderful Transaction, he orders his new Captain to erect a Monument on the opposite Shore, with the Stones which he had caused to be brought out of the midst of its Chancel (*w*).

The next Proof which God gave the now disheartened *Canaanites*, of his irresistible Power, was the surprising manner in which they besieged and took the first City in that Country, and the miraculous Downfal of its stout Walls, by the Circumvection of the sacred Ark, in a formal Procession: Which, how strange soever it might appear to the Besieged, during the first six Days, could not fail of convincing them of it on the seventh; when

(*u*) *Josh.* iii. 13, & *seq.*

(*w*) *Ibid.* iv. 2, & *seq.*

nel (*5*). So that the crossing of it at that time by the *Israelites*, could not but be looked upon as altogether miraculous by the Inhabitants of *Canaan*:

And we are told accordingly, that, when they heard of it, their Hearts melted away, neither was there any Spirit left in them (*6*).

(*5*) *Journey from Aleppo*, p. 82.

(*6*) *Josh.* v. 1.

when they beheld their impregnable Ramparts prostrate on the Earth; themselves defenceless, and exposed on all Sides to the assailing Enemy; all their stately Temples levelled with the Ground; and all their Idols buried under their Ruins (x).

But what was to give those infatuated Nations the most sensible and irrefragable Evidence of the Vanity and Impotence of their imaginary Deities, was in making them instrumental to the Destruction of their senseless Votaries. The *Canaanites*, at this time, worshiped the Sun, Moon, Stars, and the Elements; and esteemed them as the most powerful of all the Deities: And these had hitherto shewed themselves as idle and impotent Spectators of the dreadful Havock which the *Israelites* made, both of their Temples, Idols, and their unhappy Worshipers. But now, to complete all with one signal Stroke of his Omnipotence, those Elements shall be made to assist the *Israelites* in the Slaughter of those Fugitives, which they could not reach in the Pursuit; and, by the miraculous Showers of Stones or Hail which they pour
on

(x) *Josh. vi. pass.*

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on their Heads, destroy a much greater Number of those unhappy Wretches, than the Sword of the Enemy could have done (y); whilst the two grand Luminaries are stopped at *Joshua's* Prayer, in the midst of their Course, for a whole Day, to give the *Hebrews* Light enough to pursue, and complete their Victory (z). Here then, as well as in *Egypt*, was executed a most exemplary Judgment on all their false Deities: For what could be a greater Proof of their Vanity and Impotence, than to make them thus remarkably subservient to the utter Destruction of their most zealous Worshipers? But that which still carries a greater Weight, was, that these two signal Wonders were wrought, not so much in favour of the *Israelites*, the professed Enemies to all their Deities, as to save the *Gibeonites* from the imminent Danger they were in, of being all sacrificed to the Resentment of the rest of the *Hittites*, for becoming the Servants and Profelytes of the almighty God of *Israel*: For had they been as irrevocably doomed to Destruction as their other Countrymen,

(y) *Josh. x. 11.*

(z) *Ibid. Verse 12, & seq.*

trymen, they would, like them, have still persisted in their Defiance to his supreme Power, and been involved in the same Fate; whereas God here permits his People to be over-reached by, and to make a solemn Alliance with, them; in Vindication of which he displays his almighty Power in a more signal manner, than ever he had done upon any Occasion, to preserve them, as lasting Monuments of his Clemency, and Readiness to receive all that fled to him for Protection, as to the true and only supreme Being.

The same may, in a great measure, be said of all the other *Canaanites*; whom, if he had absolutely decreed to utter Excision, he would never have suffered to have been preserved alive, and live intermixed with the *Israelites*, as he did (O). It is true, that he often

(O) It is indeed more than probable, that the Example of the *Gibeonites* encouraged many others to accept of the same peaceable Terms; and *Joshua*, and the *Israelitish* Council, to admit them to the same Benefit: For though these

last were at first highly provoked at the fraudulent manner by which they obtained them, yet when they found, soon after, how manifestly God declared himself in their Favour, and what Wonders he wrought to save them from

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often upbraids these for not totally destroying them, together with all their idolatrous Monuments; and threatens them, that they shall thenceforth prove Thorns in their Eyes, and their Gods Snares to their Feet, and Scourges to their Sides (a): But here the Sin of the *Israelites* was not the permitting those Nations to live among them, but their not obliging them to forsake all their false Deities, and to worship the only true God. It was not their sparing their Lives, but their Temples, Idols, and other superstitious Monuments, and suffering them to continue in all their Abominations, and impious Rites, that occasioned those severe

(a) *Josh. xxiii. 13. Judg. ii. 3.*

from the Fury of the five *Amorite* Kings, they might perceive just Cause to understand the Words of *Moses* in a more moderate Sense, and confine the Sentence of Excision only to those who should persist in an obstinate Defiance. On the other hand, the *Canaanites*, tho' exasperated at first at the *Gibeonites*, for entering into a private Alliance with *Israel*; yet when they once saw how

well it succeeded with them, and how ill it went with all those that were confederate against them, they might be easily induced, not only to sue for their Protection and Friendship, but to hope for a more ready Reception from the *Jewish* Chiefs; seeing they used now no Fraud to obtain it, but wholly submitted themselves to their Discretion and Mercy.

severe Threatenings against them. The Sequel evidently shewed the Justness of that Reproof; since they themselves became ensnared even by those idolatrous Monuments, the very Name and Memory of which if they had utterly destroyed, as they were enjoined, their singular Happiness, which was to attend their Obedience, and to rise and fall according to it, could not but have opened the Eyes of those unhappy Nations, to see the vast Difference between serving the great and only God, with a pure and holy Worship, and that of their vain and impotent Deities, by their abominable Rites; and that even with regard to their temporal Interest, which was all they had aimed at, or hoped for, from all their various Superstitions. So that, in a little while, the very Remembrance of them would have been quite obliterated; and both they, and the *Israelites*, have shared in the same common Blessings, and have had Cause to rejoice under the blissful Sunshine of the Divine Providence; from which none would then have been excluded, but the Obstinate and Irreclaimable.

In

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In all these things we may plainly observe, if not blinded by Prejudice, how careful the Supreme Being was to act, both with respect to the *Israelites* and *Canaanites*, in a manner equally suitable to his divine Attributes of Mercy, Wisdom, and Justice, and consistent with the Freedom of his rational Creatures; when, as is excellently expressed by the Prophet, he strives to draw them to himself *with the Cords of a Man, and Bonds of Love* (b). The former he chooses as a peculiar People; brings them up with a paternal Tenderness in the antient patriarchal Religion; and rewards their Obedience with continual Blessings; to the end that they may sow the Seeds of the same pure Worship where-ever they go. When the predeterminate Time is come for them to inherit the promised Land, he leads them thither by such Series of unheard of Wonders, as could not but convince them, and all the World, of his almighty Power (c); and, at the same time, prove the most rational Preservative against the idolatrous Infection that reigned among all its infatuated

(b) *Hos. xi. 4.*

(c) *See Exod. xxxiv. 10.*

fatuated Inhabitants. These, on the other hand, he first tries to awaken to a Sense of their horrid Superstitions, by the Fame of those dreadful Judgments which he had executed on the *Egyptians*, and their false Deities. These not proving sufficient, he alarms them with fresh Proofs of his almighty Power, and Threats of his inevitable Vengeance; and, to put an effectual End to all their Confidence in their false Deities, and impious Superstitions, makes the very Elements, and two Luminaries (P), to contribute to the Excision of the most hardened and obstinate among them: Whilst those who accepted

(P) As my Design in this Essay reached no farther than the giving a more rational Explanation about the Divine Judgments executed on the *Egyptian* Deities, than any I had yet met with; it will not, I hope, be expected, that I should here enter into an Inquiry into that extraordinary Fact; that is, whether it was a real and supernatural Solstice, or a mere *Aurora*, or strange *Luor*, which af-

forded *Joshua's* Host Light enough to discomfit the confederate *Amorites*, much less to account for the Inaccuracy of *Joshua's* Expression of the Sun standing still, &c. which is quite opposite to the now universally received System of Astronomy, and of the Earth's Motion round the Sun: All which would afford Matter enough for a particular Dissertation, in which it would be hardly possible for me to add any

cepted the Terms of Peace, and were willing to renounce all their Idolatry, their brutish, unnatural Rites, Sorceries, and other Abominations; and become Profelytes of the true God, are, by the Example of the *Gibeonites*, encouraged to try to save their Lives, by accepting of the proffered Conditions of Peace (d). So that it is evident, from the Whole, that the Extirpation of the former was not owing to any absolute and irrevocable Decree, but to the Hardness of their own Hearts (e); which made them reject the

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(d) See before, Note (O).

(e) Compare *Josh. xix. 20.* with *Wisd. xii. 3, & seq.* and with what hath been said formerly of God's hardening Pharaoh's Heart, page 78, & seq.

any thing new, to what hath been said on that curious Subject by much abler Heads. For which Reason I shall content myself with referring your Antagonist to the principal Authors who have set that Matter in the fairest Light, answer-

ed all the Cavils; and fully confuted every Objection raised against that miraculous Fact; and wherein he may with Ease come at a satisfactory Knowledge of all that hath been written on either Side of the Question (1).

(1) See *Univ. Hist. fol. vol. i. ch. vii. sect. 7: 8vo. Edit. vol. iii. p. 464, & seq.* Shuckford. *Connect. vol. iii. p. 453, & seq.* Calmet. *Dissert. on that Miracle, and Diction. sub Joshua.*

most pure and reasonable Religion, rather than part with their old shameful Superstition. And where is the Wonder that the same supreme Judge, who rained down Fire and Sulphur from Heaven on *Sodom*, and other neighbouring Cities, for their unnatural Sins, should doom these to utter Destruction, for more unnatural and impious Abominations, and for introducing them into the Worship of their Deities?

But what is the most surprising of all is, that the ungrateful *Israelites* should so soon cool in their Zeal and Obedience; and, instead of either totally abolishing this Religion, with all its Rites, or exterminating those that still persisted in them, they suffered both to continue in the very midst of them; the Consequence of which was, as had been often foretold to them, that they soon became ensnared by them; and insensibly fell from the Worship of God into a most shameful Fondness for the impious Superstitions and Customs of the *Canaanites*. Yet even then God did neither suffer them to go on in their Apostasy, without eminent Proofs of his Power and Displeasure; nor did he

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cease

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cease giving them fresh ones of his Mercy and Goodness, as soon as his Punishments had brought them to a Sense of their Impiety : Their whole History, for some Centuries after *Joshua*, is nothing else but a constant Alternative of new Defections, followed by some severe and long-continued Captivity; and of Repentance and Pardon; attended by some signal Deliverance. Both were still so many standing and unexceptionable Witnesses of his supreme Power, Justice, and Goodness; and sufficient to render both the *Israelites* and *Canaanites* inexcusable; and, at the same time, leave such strong and sensible Traces of his Divine Providence over the *Jewish* Church, as should fully answer the all-wise Designs of it; as it effectually did, through all its various Changes, during the Space of 1100 Years; that is, till all its figurative Train of Rites and Ordinances were plainly fulfilled and superseded by the new and more spiritual Dispensation of the Gospel; and all the bloody, typical Sacrifices, of the patriarchal and *Jewish* Oeconomy, had their full Completion in that of our Divine Redeemer.



ESSAY II.

LETTER III.

On the surprising Adventure, Disappointment, and Punishment, of Balaam; and the sad Catastrophe of the Midianites. Num. xxii. & seq.

Reverend Sir,

I Doubt not but I have by this time paved the Way towards accounting, in a rational manner, for this so much canvassed and burlesqued Part of the sacred History; and that you at least, if not your sceptical Antagonists, behold it in a much different Light, than you formerly seemed to do. I shall now endeavour to shew, that it really is no other than a regular and uniform Sequel of that miraculous Competition between the Supreme LORD, the God of *Israel*, and

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and the false Deities of the *Moabites*, and other Heathen Nations, mentioned in my last Essay. And with this remarkable Difference, that *Balak*, and the *Moabites*, being now so fully convinced of his superior and irresistible Power, not only by what had been transacted in *Egypt*, but by the late fatal Catastrophe of *Sihon* King of the *Amorites*, and *Og* King of *Basan* (a), had but little Heart to hazard a fresh Competition between their own Deities and him, notwithstanding their extreme Desire to put some effectual Stop to the alarming Progress of the successful *Israelites*, under their Divine Guide and Protector. Had *Balak* stayed to be better informed of their Design, he would easily have found, that he had little to fear from them; seeing God had expressly forbid them to commit any Hostilities against them, on account of their being descended from *Lot* (b). Neither could he be ignorant of the Friendship and Alliance which was between the hospitable *Jethro*, one of their Chief Priests and Princes, and *Moses*, the *Israelitish* Chief: So that it would have been easy for him, by the Mediation

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(a) *Num.* xxi. 21, & seq. *Deut.* ii. 9, & seq. iii. 1, & seq.
(b) *Deut.* ii. 9, & seq.

diation of the former, to have obtained such a firm and lasting Peace from the latter, as would have put an End to all his Fears from that Quarter. But in that Case there would have been no room for this extraordinary Contest, by which the Divine Providence designed to display his singular Favour to *Israel*: And therefore *Balak* is suffered to cherish and heighten his ill-grounded Fears, and to use all the Arts against them which his Prudence and Superstition could suggest to him: In consequence of which he first calls the *Midianites* to his Assistance, and enters into a strong Alliance with them; and then sends for the celebrated Inchanter *Balaam*, to come and curse this so dreaded People: Not doubting, by one or both these means, to gain some considerable Advantage against them (c).

Whether this famous Person was a real Prophet, and Worshiper of the true God, or an Heathen, and a mere Conjuror, or Soothsayer, is, you know, much disputed by the Learned among *Jews* and *Christians*, both antient and modern. However, not to enter too deep into that needless Controversy, I can see

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(c) *Num.* xxii. 3, & seq.

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no Reason why we may not admit him to have been a real Prophet, tho' otherwise a bad Man, and much given to Incantation, and other heathenish Superstitions; and a Worshiper of the true God, tho' not in all respects a true Worshiper of him. The Tenor of *Moses's* Relation seems plainly to intimate the former; and his own Words to *Balak's* Messengers (*d*), *If Balak would give me his House full of Silver and Gold, I cannot go beyond the Word of (Jehovah) the LORD my God, will not give us Leave to doubt of the latter.* We read of many such real Prophets among the *Jews*, who did yet prostitute their Office for Lucre, and other fordid Ends (*e*): And both our Saviour and *St. Paul* assure us, that neither the Gift of Prophecy, nor that of Miracles, deprive a Man of the Liberty of acting quite opposite to his Character (*f*): For which Reason *St. Austin* rightly enough reckons *Balaam* among those who shall say to Christ, at the last Day, *Lord, have not I prophesied in thy Name (g)? &c.* However that be, whether we take him to have been

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(*d*) *Num.* xxii. 18.

(*e*) *Jerem.* v. 31. *Mic.* iii. 5, & seq. *Zephan.* iii. 4, & alib. pass.

(*f*) *Matth.* vii. 22. *I Cor.* xiii. 2.

(*g*) *Quæst. in Num. Art. ix. quæst.* 48.

a Prophet, or a bare Conjuror, here was the Interposition of the divine Power plainly display'd, in obliging him, contrary to his Inclination and Interest, as well as in spite of his Inchantment, to bless, in so singular a manner, those whom *Balak* sent for him to curse; and the Sequel sufficiently proves him to have been a true Prophet so far, whatever Character he might bear before or since; and the open Confession he was forced to make to *Balak*, before his whole Court, and all the *Midianitish* Princes, how ineffectual all his Inchantments, and other Stratagems, would prove, against a Nation, whom God had made Choice of to be the Object of his special Blessing, could not but make, not only a suitable Impression upon them, in favour of it, but likewise give them a kind of Warning and Fore-taste of the Impiety, as well as Vanity, of all their superstitious Efforts and Stratagems to obstruct their Success. It could not but convince them of these two great and important Truths (the inculcating of which into all those Nations was the main Scope of all this long Series of Wonders); viz. That there was an over-ruling Power that governed all things in Heaven and Earth by his unerring Providence, and chiefly

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chiefly for the Good and Benefit of those that acknowledged and relied on him: And, 2^{dly}, That all the Deities they had adopted, and confided in, were either imaginary Delusions, or else Creatures subordinate to, and wholly directed by, him.

Here your Antagonist, having nothing material to object against so reasonable a Design, sets himself wholly to find Fault with the strange, and, as he is pleased to call it, unaccountable Method, by which it was conducted: The Whole of whose Objections may be reduced to the following Heads; *viz.*

1. The Improbability of God's endowing a Person of *Balaam's* Character with the Spirit of Prophecy, and vouchsafing to converse with him in so peculiar and intimate a manner.

2. Of his so strictly forbidding him to go with *Balak's* first Messengers; and permitting, nay, ordering him to go with the second.

3. Of his being angry with him for going, after he had enjoined him to do so.

4. Of

4. Of his sending an Angel to obstruct his Journey ; yet bidding him to pursue it under such Restrictions, as he could not transgress without his Permission.

5. His opening the Mouth of the dumb Ass, to reprimand him for his pretended ill-tim'd Repentment and Cruelty.

And, lastly, The strange Reproof, and strict Charge, of the Angel to him ; the one for abusing his Beast ; and the other, not to act or speak otherwise than God should see fit to direct him (b).

Let us now examine each of these Articles by the Rules of Reason ; and see whether, upon an impartial Examination, they will appear in that ridiculous Light in which he hath stated them ; or not rather as uniform and well-conducted Series of Events, all tending to the End proposed ; the reducing those infatuated Nations from their vain Confidence in their false Deities, to a due Sense of, and a steady Reliance on, God's all-wise and overruling Providence, in a way the most adapt-

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(b) See Numb. xxii. 5—35.

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ed to their Capacities, and, at the same time; the most effectual to convince rational Creatures, without the least Infringement on their natural Liberty.

1st, then, With respect to the pretended Improbability of God's endowing a Person of *Balaam's* Character with the Gift of Prophecy, I cannot see whence it arises: And it being his declared Design to convince those superstitious Nations, who placed no small Confidence in their pretended Prophets, of his over-ruling Power; where is the Absurdity, or even Wonder, if, in compliance with their Notion, he should raise a real one among them, that should fully answer that End? But why should he make Choice of one of his vile Character? Most probably, because one of a better would not have answered the End proposed; and his blessing *Israel*, instead of cursing them, might have been looked upon as the Effect of his Zeal for that favourite Nation of Providence, and of his Hatred to the idolatrous Notions and Rites of the *Moabites* and *Midianites*; whereas a Person of *Balaam's* unbounded Ambition and Avarice, and moreover addicted to the reigning

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reigning Sorceries and Inchantments of those Times, being forced, against his own Inclination and Interest, to bless those, whom *Balak* would have bribed him, at any Rate, to curse, could not but convince them, as well as all the rest of his Behaviour on this Occasion did, that he was driven to it by a superior, or rather irresistible Power; as, on the other hand, had he been less than a real Prophet, or had he been, as many learned Men have supposed him, only a mere Conjuror or Inchanter, all that he uttered in favour of the *Israelitish* People, might have been imputed either to his Want of Skill, or to a sudden, inward Fear of bringing some heavy Resentment from them upon his Head, or to any other Cause, rather than to such a divine and irresistible Impulse.

But here your Antagonist further objects against the Probability of God's condescending to converse, or, as he modestly words it, to dialogue it, with such an infamous Conjuror, or, at best, a base Prostituter of the prophetic Gift. But why not, as well as he vouchsafed to discourse with *Adam* and *Eve* after

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after their Transgression; or with the Serpent (i); or even with Satan (k)? But farther; if we consider that this was the same Divine Person, who here spoke to *Balaam*, that had manifested himself in so singular a manner to *Abraham*, *Isaac*, &c. and more lately to *Moses* and *Aaron*, and was now the chief Conductor of all these surprising Events, in favour of the *Israelites*; the same moreover who had been promised to our first Parents, and was, in the Fulness of Time, to appear in our Nature (l); where will be the Improbability of his now conversing thus familiarly with the very Man whom he had pitch'd upon, for the Reasons above-mentioned, as a proper Instrument to carry on his present Design (A)? And since the Event

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(i) *Genesis* iii. *pass.*

(k) *Joh* ii. 7. ii. 1, & *seq.*

(l) See *int. al. Shuckf. Connect.* vol. i. lib. v. vol. ii. l. 9.

(A) As for the Cavils which your Opponent raises against the Expressions here made use of by *Moses*, and representing the Deity as inquiring of *Balaam*, who, whence, and on what Errand, those Mel-

sengers came, they will hardly be liable to be misunderstood by those who are ever so little versed in the Stile and Genius of the *Hebrew*, and other Oriental Tongues; much less be thought to imply, that God

wanted

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was to end in Disgrace and Disappointment, who could be more deserving of it, than he who appeared so ready to prostitute his prophetic Office to his own ambitious Views?

But, 2dly, Why, says your Antagonist, should God so strictly forbid him to go with *Balak's* first Messengers; and yet not only permit him, but oblige him, to go with the second? I answer, for the greater Pomp and Grandeur of the Thing. Had he been suffered

wanted to be informed about those Messengers, and the Occasion of their Errand, any more than when he asked Adam in Paradise, *Where art thou* (1)? or Cain, *Where is thy Brother Abel* (2)? *Hagar*, Sarah's Maid, *Whence comest thou, and whither goest thou* (3)? *Where is Sarah thy Wife* (4)? The like may be said of the Question with which the Prophet *Isaiah* prefaced his

Message from God to *Hezekiah*, upon his receiving the *Babylonish* Ambassadors (5), *Whence are these Men? What said they? What have they seen in thy House?* &c. all which he was fully apprised of before he came to him. Of the same Nature are the Questions asked of some of the Prophets: *Jeremiah*, *What seest thou* (6)? And many more such, which need not here be mention'd.

(1) *Genesis* iii. 9.

(2) *Ibid.* iv. 9.

(3) *Ibid.* xvi. 8.

(4) *Ibid.* xviii. 9.

(5) 2 *Kings* xx. 14.

(6) *Jerem.* i. 11.

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suffered to go with the first, who, the Text intimates, were but few in Number, and Persons of a lower Rank; their Report of the extraordinary Opposition which he was to meet with on the Way, having no other Witnesses than they, and the Prophet's two Servants, might have been liable to Suspicion; and so failed of making a due Impression on those that had sent them. But when *Balak* sees himself obliged to send new ones of an higher Rank, as well as in greater Number (who may be supposed to have had a suitable Retinue after them, being stiled Princes by the sacred (m) Historian); these, I say, accompanying the Prophet all the Way, and being Eye and Ear Witnesses of what happened to him in his Journey to the Land of *Moab*, can hardly be supposed to have countenanced, much less combined with him to invent, a Fiction so contrary to his Interest, and their own sanguine Expectations. And as this Scene of Wonders was to be a kind of Prelude to *Balak's* Disappointment, their Confirmation of it could not choose but give it an unquestionable Sanction among the *Moabites* and *Midianites*, and add Weight

(m) Num. xxii. 15.

Weight to the Prophecies which were to follow, in favour of the *Israelites*; as being the then only Nation among whom God was to establish his pure Worship, in Opposition to the Superstitions and Idolatries reigning among the rest of the World (n).

3^{dly}, But here the next Objection started by your Antagonist is, Why was God angry with *Balaam* for going with the Messengers, seeing he had not only permitted, but ordered, him to do so? The common Solution which the *Jewish* and *Christian* Writers give us, is, that *Balaam* flattered himself, that God had or might be prevailed upon to alter his Intentions with respect to the *Israelites*, either by his Sacrifices or Inchantments; by which means he would gain some considerable Preferment, as well as great Reputation, among the *Moabites*. But if this had been the only Cause of God's Anger, would he not more probably have suffered him to go on in his fond Conceit, and then punished his Presumption, in the Face of *Moab* and *Midian*; either by forcing him to bless, instead of cursing, or by turning his Curses into Blessings?

(n) Num. xxiii. 7, & seq. 20; & seq. xxiv. 1, & seq.

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Blessings? Which would have equally answered his End, without being at the Trouble of sending an Angel to obstruct his Way. It must be owned that the Crime which the Angel here lays to his Charge, is but obscurely expressed, and, according to most Versions and Commentators, implies no more than that he had warped or perverted his Way before God (o) (B); that is, that he

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(o) *Num.* xxii. 32.

(B) The Difficulty is in fixing the true Meaning of the Verb *יָרַח* *farach*, as it occurs only in this Place, and in *Job* xvi. 11. but in a seemingly different Sense, where the Text runs, *יָרַח* *He (God) hath given me over, or shut me up, into the Hands of the Wicked*, as our Version renders it; or, as it might still be more literally expressed, *He hath bowed me down by the Hands of the Wicked*; alluding, as the Context seems to hint, to the Depredations which *Job* had suffered from the

plundering *Sabeans*, &c. mentioned *Ch.* i. *Ver.* 15. and 17. According to which Sense, the Expression made use of by the Angel, *farach haderek lenegdi, Thy Way, or View, is base and low in my Eyes*, from the Context, may thus be paraphrased, *Because thou hast stooped so low, as to prostitute thy prophetic Office to thy own selfish Views; and hast hired thyself to curse that very People, who thou wert told by God himself were the Objects of his Favour* (1); nay,

(1) *Vid.* *Num.* xxii. 12.

either proposed to himself a different Issue of this Expedition than God had decreed; or that he was meditating on some Way how to elude or frustrate his Designs, if he should find them contrary to his own and *Balak's* Expectation; or, perhaps, lastly, how to palliate the Matter with *Balak*, and his People, in case he did not succeed, so as to avoid their Resentment. In any of which Cases he appears to have a greater Regard to his own Credit and Interest, than to God's Commission and Design. Where then is the Improbability of an Angel being sent to reprove him for his selfish Views, and to enjoin him to proceed as he was directed, and leave the Issue of the Whole to the Divine Providence? especially as such an extraordinary Apparition could not but add a farther Weight to what he should be afterwards bid to say or do.

But
 nay, and to make use of all thy enchanting Arts, so thou mayest but obtain the Wages of Unrighteousness (2).

(2) Confer Num. xxii. 32. and 2 Pet. ii. 15. Jud. Vers. 11.

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But this Rencontre, as related and circumstantiated by the inspired Historian, is, it seems, what your Antagonist thinks cannot be treated with too great Contempt. A celebrated Prophet and Diviner, and consequently a Person well acquainted of course with such Visions, is opposed by an Angel, with a drawn Sword; yet goes resolutely on, insensible of his Danger; whilst the Beast he rides on, the most stupid Animal of the whole Creation, is clear-sighted enough to perceive and avoid it, by turning out of the Way, and saves her Rider from running blindfold into it. This is repeated twice more, in two such narrow Paths, that the Ass is forced, in the one, to crush her Rider's Foot against the Wall; and, in the other, to crouch down upon her Belly, to avoid his rushing on his Destruction; for which extraordinary Care and Concern she is only rewarded with a severe Drubbing. Which, says your Friend, deserves the greater Admiration or Laughter; the Perspicuity and Prudence of the dumb Creature, or the Stupidity and Ingratitude of the Prophet? But what is even this, compared to the surprising Dialogue

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that ensues between the Master and his Beast, in which the latter hath so much the Advantage of the former, in point of Reasoning and Temper; in that she contents herself with calmly expostulating his unjust Severity; whilst he, on the contrary, breaks out into a furious Resentment, and wishing at that Instant for a Sword to dispatch her, for her extraordinary and repeated Services to him (*p*)? The Angel likewise, in his Opinion, makes but a mean Figure amongst them: His ill-timed Anger against the Prophet, whose Eyes he knew to be with-holden from seeing him; and his rebuking him for his ill Requital to his Ass, whose new-acquired Gifts of Speech and Reasoning, he thinks, made him sufficient Amends for his severe Drubbing; are, he supposes very unsuitable to the Character of an heavenly Messenger (*q*); and his telling him, that he would have killed him upon the Spot, if the Ass had not timely saved him, by turning aside out of his Reach (*r*), is what he judges would have rather become the Malice

(*p*) *Num. xxii. 22—29.*

(*q*) *Ibid. Verse 32.*

(*r*) *Ibid. Verse 33.*

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lice of an infernal one. So that, upon the Whole, he highly commends *Josephus* for suppressing that Part of the Dialogue, rather than exposing his Credulity, by trying in vain to palliate it (s).

I have now given your Antagonist's Objections their full Strength, tho' not couched them in his ludicrous and sarcastical Terms; to avoid, as much as possible, the distasteful Contrast that would appear between them, and the Seriousness with which the Subject, whatever he may think to the contrary, deserves to be treated. In doing which I shall not, like some of the *Jewish* and *Christian* Writers, have recourse to allegorical and other elusory Subterfuges (C); which, for aught

(s) *Antiq. lib. iv. c. 6.*

(C) *Maimonides*, and some other *Jewish* Writers, pretend that this whole Scene was transacted only in a Vision, in which they have been followed by some Christians. Others think, that the whole Transaction must be understood in an allegorical

Sense; that the Ass was stopped from going on by some extraordinary Impulse; that the Blows which its Rider gave it set it not a speaking articulately, but a braying; which he, however, either by his conjuring Skill, or his Acquaintance with

aught I know, have rather given Birth to those satirical Reflections, with which your Friend, and many more of the same Stamp, have treated this and other scriptural Subjects; but confine myself to making such Remarks as naturally result from *Moses's* Relation of this singular Event, and shew how every Step and Circumstance tended to the main Design, which was to convince both *Moab* and *Midian*, in the most sensible and rational Manner, of the Injustice and Inefficacy of all their Efforts against a Na-
tion

the Language of Brutes, rightly interpreted as a just Rebuke for striking her. Others again think, that *Moses* copied this whole Account out of the Memoirs which were found in *Balaam's* Custody, after he had been slain by the *Israelites*; and were supposed to have been written by him: Upon which Account *Moses* thought proper to transmit them in

the very Terms they were couched in; not, indeed, to have them believed as true, but merely to expose the Vanity of the Diviners of his Time (1). All which are justly looked upon as mere Evasions, and contrary to the express Tenor of the Text, as well as to the Sense in which two of the Apostles have understood it (2).

(1) *De his Maim. Mor. Nevoch. & al. Jud. Greg. Nyssens. in vit. Mos. Tostal. Le Clerc, & al. in Num. xxiii. 28.*

(2) *2 Pet. ii. 16. Jude Verse 11.*

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tion from whom they had nothing to fear; and consequently, no Grounds for any such hostile Stratagems, as they were hatching against them; and who, being under the Guidance and Protection of an infinitely superior Power to all their pretended Deities, were out of the Reach of all their malicious Darts, unless it were to return them with double Force on their own Heads.

Let us then suppose, that this celebrated Diviner, by whose Inchantments the *Moabites*, and their Confederates, expected to prove more fatal to the *Israelitish* Host, than all their united Force and Valour could be, is now in full March, at the Head of a numerous Train of Noblemen, and in full Scent of Honour and Preferment; when, on the sudden, and contrary to its usual Custom, his Beast makes a full Stop, without any visible Hindrance, and will not be set forward again, but by dint of dry Blows: They come next to a narrow Path, or Defile; where, after a fresh Stop, and a second Drubbing, they see the fearful Beast squeeze itself quite close to the Wall, to avoid something in its Way, which neither he nor his

Company can perceive; and in doing which, it is forced to crush its Rider's Foot against the Wall. This could not but be somewhat surprising to them; but still more so, when, after some Miles riding, they come into a streight Path, where they see the frightened Beast, instead of going forward, crouch suddenly on its Belly; because it saw no Way to slide by the unperceived Opposer, and continue a while motionless, under a third, and more severe, Volley of Blows. All this could not fail of drawing the Attention, as well as Wonder, of the whole Caravan: But whilst they are pondering on the Strangeness of the Adventure, a new Scene offers itself; in which tho' the Prophet had the largest Share of the Surprise, yet it could not but fill the rest of the Company with fresh Astonishment. For here, on the sudden, the dumb Beast's Mouth is unexpectedly opened; not in its usual braying Tone, but in such a manner, that the Rider feels himself severely reproved for his ill-timed Severity; but whether in such articulate Words as were understood by the rest, or only by the Prophet, I shall not presume to determine; tho' there is no Doubt but they understood the passionate Reply which he made
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to it. They must be no less surprised at his passionate Expressions on that Occasion, when they heard him wish for a Sword to slay the guiltless Animal; without being able so much as to guess at the Cause of all this extraordinary Behaviour, both of the Ass and its Rider. Whilst they stand in this Suspense, they see the latter fall prostrate on his Face before the Angel, and making his Apology to him for what he had ignorantly done, and offering to return to his own Home, since God seemed now so displeased with his Journey to the Land of *Moab* (t). I will not pretend to decide, whether the Messengers of *Balak*, who were present at this extraordinary Scene, did see the Angel, or heard what he said to the Prophet, because the Text hints nothing of it; but as they could not but hear what he said to the heavenly Messenger, and admire his humble Behaviour to him, they must of course suppose, that there must be something more than natural, that had thus stayed the Ass in its Way, and now at last extorted such Language and Deportment from its Rider; for hitherto he had betrayed

(t) *Num. ub. sup. Ver. 21—34.*

betrayed such uncommon Eagerness to go with them, and satisfy their Desires, in hopes of the large Rewards promised to him, that he could not forbear expressing an indecent Resentment against the Beast, for seeming to oppose or retard his Speed; whereas, after the seeing of this unexpected Vision, he appears altogether discouraged, and ready to desist, and give up all further Hopes of Preferment. And as this Rencontre made him so strangely alter his Behaviour, and cast such a Damp upon his sanguine Views; so I doubt not, but in the Account he gave them of it, as they went on, it produced a different Kind of Discourse with them, and such as would prove a proper Preface to the Disappointment they were like to meet with. For it is plain, from the strict Charge which the Angel gave him, *of speaking only what God should dictate to him* (u), that he had no great Hopes, that the Event would prove according to his and their Wishes. And accordingly, upon his first Approach to the Moabitish King, he prepares him in the same Way, by telling him, that, now he was
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(u) Num. ub. sup. Verse 35.

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come, he had no Power at all to speak any thing, but what the Lord should please to put in his Mouth (w). And it is hardly to be doubted, but his Messengers took also Care to inform him of all that had passed in their Journey homewards; particularly, the Rencontre with the Angel, and the Adventure of the Ass: From both which they might find Occasion to infer a Likelihood, that their Designs against *Israel* were going to be defeated by a superior Power; and might be more upon their Guard to examine every Circumstance, to prevent their being imposed upon by the Person who was pitched upon to be the chief Actor in it. For hitherto I see no Reason to suspect him of any Cheat; because, tho' he might be easily supposed to have contrived that surprising Scene, and pretended an extraordinary Vision, in order to cover his Want of Power or Skill, or to avoid *Balak's* Resentment; yet how could he ever manage his dull Beast so artfully, as make it contribute its Part in, and to act it with the same Exactness as he did his own, without being perceived by some

(w) *Num. ub. sup. Verse 38.*

of the By-standers? How could he make it stand stock still in one Place, squeeze itself against a Wall in another, to avoid something which neither he nor they could see; and in the third to crouch at once on its Belly; and in all three of them to continue motionless, under such a Volley of dry Blows, and escape the Notice of some or other of his numerous Retinue? But I shall sufficiently shew, by-and-by, how inconsistent his Deportment in the Land of *Moab*, the singular manner of his blessing the *Israelitish* Tribes, and the Nature and Extent of the Prophecy he uttered on that Occasion, is to such a Supposition. But before I am come to that, it will be necessary to remove the two great Difficulties which your Antagonist raises against the Probability of the Adventure; *viz.* That of the *Ass's* assuming, as he terms it, an human Voice and Speech, and a reasonable Faculty, which, even according to the *Mosaic* Relation, appears much superior to that of its Master, tho' a Prophet and Diviner: And, *2dly*, The strange Rebuke which the Angel gives to the latter, for his ill-timed Cruelty to the former, allowing the Case to have been
been

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been worthy of the Interposition of such an heavenly Messenger.

As to the first, the Impossibility of an Ass's *assuming* (he should have said rather, being miraculously endowed with) an human Voice, and rational Faculty, it will be time enough to answer it, when he hath proved that pretended Impossibility of all Miracles, of which this is allowed to be one; and that no more against Nature, or above the Power of an almighty Agent, than any of those that were wrought in *Egypt*, or at the *Red Sea*; and for which I shall refer him to what hath been said upon that Subject in the last Essay (x), and more particularly against the pretended Impossibility of all Miracles in general (y). For if it be once allowed that God hath still reserved to himself the Power, for some wise and important Ends, to dispense with his own Laws (and his bare Denial of it, against all Reason, and the Sense of all Nations, is no Proof, that he hath not or cannot do so), how will he make it appear, that it is more above the Power of an almighty

(x) See before, p. 33, & seq.

(y) Ibid. p. 29, & seq. 39, & seq.

almighty Being, to enable a dumb Animal to pronounce some few articulate Words, in a rational Order, than to cleave the *Red Sea*, to rain down Manna six Days, and with-hold it on the seventh, or to cure the deadly Sting of fiery Serpents by the bare looking on an artificial brazen one? And if it be farther objected, that the dumb Beast shewed a greater Degree of Wisdom than the Prophet that rode it, where even then will be the Wonder, if we consider who inspired it? And if some of the Brute Creation do, in many Cases, display a greater Sagacity in their Actions than those of the human Species, who value themselves so much on their superior Faculties; need we be surpris'd here, that the most stupid of all Animals, being, on such a particular Occasion as this, endowed with a much higher Degree of Rationability, which is the utmost Extent that can be allowed to the Miracle, should argue more justly than its Master, whose Judgment was hurried away by the Torrent of his boundless Ambition, and the Prospect of some considerable Advancement? If any thing seems to challenge our Admiration on this Occasion, it must be, one would think, the Method which
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the Divine Providence made choice of to expose the Stupidity of the Prophet (z) ; and to deter both him, and those who sent for him, from pursuing their malevolent Views against the *Israelites* ; and his choosing rather by that means to forewarn them of the Danger they would bring upon them, than to punish them for persisting in them. He might as easily have ordered the Angel to punish *Balaam* with immediate Death, as barely to obstruct his Career ; but if he prefers the sparing him, in order to make him a more effectual Instrument to convince both *Moab* and *Midian*, how vain and dangerous all their Efforts would prove, against a People whom he had taken under his special Conduct and Favour, why should the Singularity of the Miracle be deemed a sufficient Proof against the Reality of it, when it is, in all other respects, so agreeable to the divine Goodness ?

I would farther observe here, that the opening the Mouth of the dumb Ass could not but be a convincing Proof, both to *Balaam*,

(z) 2 Pet. ii. 16.

laam, and his Company, how vain and fruitless it would be for him to attempt, or them to bribe him, to speak otherwise than God should direct him; since the same Power that could enable a dumb Beast to speak, contrary to its Nature, was no less able to interdict the Tongue of its Rider from uttering any thing but what should be dictated to him. God might, indeed, without any farther Miracle, have put it wholly out of his Power to have done otherwise; but if, instead of depriving him of his Liberty upon this extraordinary Occasion, he is rather pleased to deter him from abusing it, and his *Moabitish* Retinue from tempting him to it, by the miraculous Speaking of a dumb Ass; was not this a most rational Way of convincing both, of his divine Interposition in favour of the *Israelites*? And here, by-the-by, did your Antagonist never read of an Ass speaking to *Bacchus*, a Lamb to *Phrixius*, an Horse to *Achilles* and *Adrastus*, a Bull to *Europa*, and an Elephant to *Porus* (a)? Should it be said, that these fabulous Stories probably took their Rise from this of *Moses*,

as

(a) *Vid. Patric. Comment. in Num. xxii.*

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as that of *Iphigenia* from that of *Jephthah's* Daughter (b); and others of the like Kind? Would it not rather confirm than confute them? Doth it not shew, that the Original of them had their Foundation in Truth, whatever may be supposed of the Copies? Are not moreover antient Oracles said to have been given by Stones, Trees, and other inanimate Things? And whence had these their Origin, more probably than from the miraculous *Urim* and *Tummim*, worn by the Jewish High-Priest (c)?

However, lest the Miracle of the dumb Beast above-mentioned should not prove sufficient to dissuade the ambitious Prophet from pursuing his hostile Designs, God is pleased to add another, no less deterring; viz. the Apparition, and severe Threatening, of an Angel; that as the first plainly shewed how easily God could direct and controul his Words, so the other might convince him of the Danger of disobeying his express Commands.

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If

(b) *Judg.* xi. 30, & seq.

(c) See *Un. Hist.* fol. Edit. vol. i. ch. vii. sect. 2. & 8vo. vol. iii. p. 76, & seq. sub not. 436, & seq. (C).

If your Antagonist should insist, that the above Instances, out of Heathen Authors, ought to be understood in a figurative or allegorical Sense, I would ask of him, why may not the same be as well said of this I am upon? Sure I am, that it carries with it a much more excellent and instructive Moral, than any that he can draw out of his profane Mythologists; whilst it represents to us, in the most glaring Light, the dreadful Effects of Ambition and Avarice, in the Person of one of the most celebrated Diviners of the East; who, in spite of his great Skill, Learning, and other singular Qualifications, suffers himself to be hurried, as it were blindfold, by his predominant Passion, into the greatest Danger; so that neither God's express Prohibition and Threats, nor his other miraculous Warnings, can prevent his falling a fatal Sacrifice to it. I may safely add, that such an allegorical Application is so far from being inconsistent with the main Scope of whole Transaction, that the most remarkable ones of this Nature, recorded in Holy Writ, plainly appear to have been conducted by the Divine Providence, with this further View,
either

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either of prophetic Warning to the Persons concerned, or of Instruction to those that should read or hear of them afterwards. Thus I observed, in the former Essay, how *Aaron's Rod*, swallowing up those of the *Egyptian* Inchanters, was designed, most probably, to shew the ill Success that would attend the latter, in their ill-timed Opposition of the former; and that the turning the Waters into Blood did no less pre-signify the dreadful Catastrophe that was to close up the whole Contest (*d*). And why may we not suppose this whole Transaction to have been thus conducted with the same gracious View, not only towards the infatuated Prophet, whose Thirst after Honour and Preferment made him overlook the most imminent Danger to which that had exposed him; and, at the same time, to deter both *Moab* and *Midian* from pursuing their vain and injurious Efforts against the *Israelites*? Your Antagonist ought to have known, that such allegorical Way of Writing and Interpreting was one of the most esteemed Branches of Learning in those Days; and no Man was better qual-

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lified

(*d*) See before, p. 97, & seq. 110, & seq.

lified than *Balaam* to have made a true Application of every particular Event, had his Ambition permitted him to reflect seriously upon it. However, the Issue sufficiently explained their Intention: *Balak*, having tried in vain to avert God's special Blessing from the *Israelites*, by all the Ways which his Superstition could suggest to him, or *Balaam's* Skill contrive, dismisses him with this remarkable Speech; *I thought indeed to promote thee to great Honour; but the Lord Jehovah hath kept thee back from Honour (e)*. After which we do not find, that he tried any further Inchantments, or other means, to annoy the *Israelites*; if we except his joining with the *Midianites* in the Project of debauching them by the Charms of their beautiful Females; of which most pernicious Attempt I shall speak in the Sequel; but, from that time, left them to enjoy the Divine Blessing and Guidance unmolested; by which he saved himself, and his People, from that dreadful and universal Destruction, which the *Midianites* brought upon themselves, by too greedily pursuing *Balaam's* destructive Counsel;

(e) *Num.* xxiv. 11.

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Counsel; and in which they quickly became the dreadful Victims; he, of his Ambition and Avarice; and they, of their unjust Hatred and Impiety (f).

By this time, I hope, another of your Antagonist's Difficulties is pretty well cleared; whether the perverse View of the ambitious Prophet was a thing of Moment enough to deserve the Commissioning of an Angel to oppose him? God might indeed have stoped him short, by an immediate and irresistible Impulse; but how could the By-standers have known whether it was a divine one, or only occasioned by some conscious Fear, either of his own Inability, or of exposing himself to some dreadful Resentment, either from the *Moabitish* Monarch, or from the *Israelitish* Host? Besides, such an absolute Restraint upon the Will would have been inconsistent with the Method of God's dealing with rational Creatures; nor could it have turn'd to his Glory, like that of convincing them by Arguments suitable to their rational Faculties, and Freedom of Will:

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For,

(f) *Num.* xxv. *pass.* xxxi. *pass.* 1—8.

For, by this means, he no less displays his Mercy and Goodness, than he doth his Justice, in punishing them for their Abuse of it; as here in the Case of *Balaam*, and the *Midianites*. And can it be said, that the Declaring of the divine Will, either to a whole Nation, or even to one single Person, for their Sakes, in order to convince them, that their Devices, and hostile Stratagems, were quite opposite to it, and would not only prove vain and fruitless, but dangerous and hurtful, was beneath the Office or Dignity of an Angel?

But your Antagonist seems mostly dissatisfied with the Behaviour and Reproof of the Angel to the Prophet; and thinks, that his declaring, that he would surely have killed him, if his Afs had not prevented it, by luckily avoiding to come within his Reach, is more becoming the Language of an infernal, than that of an heavenly, Messenger. But here again he quite mistakes the Case. The Words of the Angel, how severe soever, being only designed to deter the ambitious Prophet from pursuing a Design, which, how interesting soever it might appear to him, would

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would surely turn to his Destruction, and of those who engaged him in it, cannot be justly said to favour of the Malignancy of an infernal Spirit; but rather, by far, to be exactly agreeable to the benevolent Nature of an heavenly one; and, if candidly interpreted, according to the *Hebrew* Idiom, and duly compared with the Contest, must be readily acknowledged to amount to no more than this;

“ How couldst thou thus unjustly and repeatedly abuse thy innocent Beast, and not rather conclude, from her unusual starting aside, and crouching under thee, that something extraordinary must have stood in her Way, and obliged her to do so? For, behold, I was indeed sent on Purpose to oppose thee; because thy Views were perverse before God, and opposite to his Design, in permitting thee to go with all this People. The Sight of me hath made thy Ass decline me these three times; and well it is for thee, that some divine Impulse enabled her both to perceive and avoid me, which was a sure Signal to me, that I should spare and let thee go on; and that the Divine Providence designed to cross thy malicious Purpose

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“ pose against *Israel*; and oblige thee, in
 “ spite of thy sanguine Hopes, to declare
 “ those signally blessed, whom thou wert
 “ hired to curse; for had it not been for
 “ that, I had certainly put an End at once
 “ both to thy Life, and to thy ambitious
 “ Attempts; and saved thy innocent Beast.”

For, whatever your Antagonist may please to infer from *Moses's* Words, it is plain, that the Sparing of the Prophet was not owing to the accidental Declining of the Ass, but to her being enabled to perceive and avoid the threatening Angel, by turning aside from him; and, where the Narrowness of the Way would not permit her to do so, by stopping short, and crouching upon her Belly: Both which being owing to a miraculous Impulse, gave timely Notice to the Angel to stay his Hand. The severer therefore the Threatening was, the more kindly must we judge it to have been meant; as it was indeed the most effectual Way to deter the infatuated *Balaam* from rushing farther into his utter Ruin (g).

I come

(g) *Num. xxii. 32, & seq.*

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I come next to the Apology which the Prophet makes to the Angel, which, according to our Version, runs thus (b): *I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in my Way.* But that this cannot be the true Meaning of his Words, is manifest; for how could he be guilty in this respect, if his Eyes were with-held from seeing him? But, according to the *Hebrew* Idiom, they carry a much higher Sense, and more agreeable to the Context; viz. *I have sinned, or transgressed, in that I did not know, or duly consider, that thou stoodest in my Way; or, in other Words, that thou didst oppose my Proceeding* (D); *or that it could be displeasing to God, who had given me express Leave to go.* But now,

(b) Num. xxii. 34.

(D) Much such another Apology did St. Paul make before the *Sanhedrin*, when accused of reviling God's High-Priest, for unjustly causing him to be smitten in the Mouth: *I wist not, Brethren, says he, that he*

was the High-Priest (1): For it is plain, that he could not but know him, both by his peculiar Habit, and by his sitting in the uppermost Place of that Assembly. So that he could mean no other, than that
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(1) Acts xxiii. 5.

now, continueth he, *since I find it to be so, I will readily return home again.* According to this Sense, *Balaam* artfully evades the Charge laid against him by the Angel, of having perverted his Way; that is, as I explained it a little higher, of entertaining Views so very opposite to the Divine Will, as he could not but know were sufficient to expose him to the Divine Displeasure; tho' not enough so, to make him apprehensive, or even dream,

(in the Height of his Repentment) he had not duly considered who the Person was, whom he had thus reviled, contrary to the *Mosaic Law*.

Some Interpreters indeed insist, that the Words *I did not know*, should be translated, *I do not acknowledge* him to be God's High-Priest; because, as that Dignity was become venal under the *Romans* (2), those Pontiffs who were raised to it by that unlawful Way, were not ac-

knowleged by the stricter Sort of *Jews*; which may have been the Reason of *St. Paul's* expressing himself so (3). But either of those Senses will be still agreeable to the Context, and *Balaam* will mean no more, than that his Ambition or Avarice had not permitted him to consider, whether his Proceeding was indeed of so displeasing a Nature to God, as to bring upon him such a miraculous Opposition.

(2) See *Un. Hist. fol. Edit. vol. iv. ch. xi. sect. 6.*; 8vo. *Edit. vol. x. p. 521.*

(3) See *Le Scene Essay on a new Version. To stat, Jun. Burkit, & al. in loc.*

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dream, of such an extraordinary Opposition. But the Words in the Original are still capable of another Sense; viz. *I have sinned, therefore did not perceive that thou stoodest to oppose my Way*: Or, in other Words, *It is my Fault that I did not perceive, that thou wert averse to my Proceedings*; for that is the English of that Hebrew Expression. Now therefore, since they are displeasing unto thee, *I will get me back again*. Here the Angel, having thus far deterred Balaam from pursuing his ambitious and hostile Design, gives him fresh Leave to go on with Balak's Messengers; but with this express Caution, however, that he should not speak any thing but what was dictated to him (i). Accordingly, he readily declares to that Monarch, upon his coming to welcome him, that he *had really no Power to speak a Word for, or against, the Israelites, but what God should please to put into his Mouth* (k). So far had the Rencounter and Warning of the heavenly Messenger wrought upon the ambitious Prophet, that he seems to have been fully determined to renounce all Hopes of Riches or

(i) Num. xxii. 35.

(k) Ibid. Verse 38.

or Preferment, rather than go one Step beyond his Commission. But here your Antagonist asks, Why should two such singular Miracles be wrought in vain? Or could not the Divine Providence foresee the little Effect they would have on the ambitious Prophet, till it came to the Proof? To which I answer, That God did certainly foresee, that his Avarice and Ambition would so far get the better of his Fears, as soon as the Allurements of *Balak's* great Offers came in Competition with these Warnings; and yet it would be very unjust to stile those Miracles vain, whilst they so fully answered the End for which they were wrought; *viz.* To display God's Goodness towards even that infatuated Prophet, in trying, by rational Motives, to divert him from his selfish Views, without infringing on his free Will. 2dly, To prepare the *Moabitish* Messengers, and, by their means, those who had sent them on that hostile and fruitless Errand, for the subsequent and more sensible Tokens he was going to give them, as well of his unalterable Purposes in favour of the *Israelites*, as of the Folly, Impiety, and Danger, of attempting, by whatsoever means, to obstruct them. Can
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it be reasonably said that those Miracles, which were wrought in *Egypt*, were wrought in vain, because they met with so little Regard from *Pharaoh*, and his Court? But I shall not repeat here what hath been said in a former Essay upon that Subject (1); and the Event hath but too plainly shewn an impartial Reader, to what Cause to attribute their unhappy Inefficacy, both there, and in the Land of *Moab*, to need our dwelling any farther upon it.

It must be owned, that *Moses's* Account of this extraordinary Transaction is very succinct, and leaves us to seek for sundry particular Circumstances; which, though he thought of less Moment to the main Design of his Narrative, yet would, in all Likelihood, have obviated many of the Difficulties started by your Antagonist, if they had been mentioned by him. But if so many of them may be fairly gathered from the Whole, as will clear up those seeming Difficulties; we shall have Cause rather to admire his Wisdom, than to complain of his Conciseness.

Now

(1) See before, p. 78, & seq. 104, & seq.

Now it plainly appears, from the Tenor of his Relation, that the *Moabitish* King, as well as his new Allies, placed such Confidence in the Efficacy of *Balaam's* Blessings and Curses (which was no extraordinary thing, considering the reigning Superstition of those Times), that he would have spared neither Rewards, nor sumptuous Promises, to have obtained a plentiful Shower of the latter upon the so much dreaded *Israelitish* Host (*m*); in consequence of which they would have fallen, with the utmost Speed and Fury, upon them; and made the most dreadful Slaughter they could among them. It is true, God might easily have turned their hostile Designs, with a tenfold Usury, upon their own Heads; but yet he rather chooses to spare them; doubtless out of the same Regard to their Ancestor *Lot*, that had induced him to forbid the *Israelites* to commit any Hostilities against them (*n*); and to convince them, in the mildest and most rational manner, both of the Injustice and dangerous Consequences of their Enmity, as well as of the Impiety and Folly of all their superstitious

(*m*) *Num.* xxii. 6.

(*n*) *Deut.* ii. 9.

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tious Projects and Attempts against a Nation, so favoured and protected by his unerring Providence; to the effectual Accomplishing of which nothing more was required, than the obliging of the infatuated Prophet, against his own Will and Interest, to bless it in as signal and effectual a manner, as he or they could wish to have them cursed.

Whether *Balaam* did certainly conclude, from the Angel's ambiguous Commands, not to speak any thing but what was put into his Mouth (o), that God was determined to make him bless the *Israelites* or no, is not clear from the Text; tho' enough had been said and shewn to make him apprehend, that this would be the Result of his being permitted to pursue his Journey. He did not remain long, however, in Suspense about it, after his Arrival: For when, on the very next Morning, he was conducted by the *Moabitish* King unto an Eminence, from which he could behold the *Israelitish* Camp (p); he soon concluded, as well from their prodigious Multitude, amounting to no

(o) *Num.* xxii. 35.

(p) See *Num.* xxiii. 8, 9, & 10.

less than 600,000 armed Warriors, as from the Strength and Regularity of their Encampment, and their peaceable and orderly Discipline, how impossible it would be to prevail against an Host so numerous, so well trained, and so divinely protected; and how vain and dangerous it would be for him to pronounce a Curse on a People so visibly favoured and blessed by the Supreme Being. On the other hand, the Dread of *Balak's*, and the *Midianitish* Princes Resentment, who had him now in their Power, and might suspect his Non-compliance to proceed from some secret Confederacy with their Enemies, rather than a Divine Interposition, added to the Mortification of seeing himself at once deprived of all his flattering Prospects, could not but give him the greatest Uneasiness: So that, to extricate himself, if possible, from so dangerous a Dilemma, he sees himself obliged to have recourse to some of those Inchantments, which, according to the superstitious Theology of those Times, were imagined to be the most capable of engaging the Sun, Moon, Stars, and all other inferior Dignities, to espouse the Quarrel of *Moab* and *Midian* against the *Israelites*: And here again the Divine

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Divine Providence, pursuing still the same mild and gracious Tract, is pleased to permit him to try the utmost of his Skill, in order the more effectually to convince him, and his infatuated Clients, of the Vanity and Inefficacy of his Art; and oblige them to acknowledge with him, that *surely there was no Incantment against Jacob, nor Divination that could prevail against Israel* (o).

But here it may appear somewhat surprising, that *Balaam* should so soon forget his former Resolution, or obliterate the Impression which his late Encounter with the Angel had made upon him; and much more so, how he could be so soon prevailed upon to act contrary to that noble Declaration he had so lately made to *Balak*, That if he would give him his House full of Silver and Gold, he could not be allowed to utter one Word beyond what the Lord (*Jehovah*) was pleased to dictate to him. But the Wonder will soon vanish, if we consider, 1st, That *Balak* might take that as an artful Grimace, chiefly calculated to extort a more
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(o) *Num.* xxiii. 23.

ample Reward from him ; and, on that account, be the more profuse in his Promises to him ; as he could not but plainly see, that Avarice and Ambition were his predominant Passions. 2dly, *Balaam* had, by this time, beheld so much of the Splendor of the *Mobabitish* Court, and received such extraordinary Honours and Caresses, both from that, and from the *Midianitish* Princes, as might easily outbalance all other Considerations with him ; and if he still retained, as he could hardly do otherwise, any Fear of the Divine Displeasure, it was now outweighed by a greater and more affecting one, to a Man of his Character ; viz. that of forfeiting all those Honours, and flattering Promises, and being dismissed with Shame and Disgrace. However, 3dly, He had still a Salvo against his Fear of the Divine Displeasure, namely, that he did not intend, by those Inchantments, to thwart the Purposes of the Supreme Being ; but only to try to render them more favourable to his Wishes, by taking to his Assistance all those inferior Deities, and striving to obtain that by their Mediation, and benign Influence, which he could not procure to his generous Clients

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Clients by any other Interest (E). Accordingly, the first Essay he made was the ordering of seven Altars to be built, and a Bullock and a Ram to be offered upon each of them (p) : Where it is worth observing, that this Kind and Number of Victims is not only enjoined by the *Mosaic* Law, upon various Occasions; but likewise to *Job's* three Friends, by way of Atonement for their Trespas (q). But as to that Number of Altars, we nowhere read of any such; nor indeed of any

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(p) *Num.* xxiii. 1, & seq.

(q) *Job*, cap. ult. ver. 8.

(E) There could be nothing in all this, inconsistent either with the superstitious Theology of those Nations, or incongruous to the Character of *Balaam*, both as Prophet, and Worshiper of the true God, as I have shewn at the Entrance on this Essay. And in case his Endeavours to obtain the so much desired Favour did not meet with Success, he could but, according to his former Resolution, comply with God's Injunction of blessing *Israel*, in what manner, and to what Degree, he should please to order it; in which case he would be then so far acquitted by *Moab* and *Midian*, that he had done all in his Power to answer their Requests, and that his Disappointment was visibly owing to a divine and irresistible Interposition; to the Truth of which, the Rencounter with the Angel, and the Miracle of the dumb Ass's speaking, as seen and vouched by *Balak's* Messengers, would give a still greater Sanction.

more than one at a time, either under the Patriarchal, or *Mosaic*, Dispensation; neither indeed was a greater Number compatible with the Notion of one Supreme Being, which *Balaam* professed to worship. But if he reared them to the seven Planets, which were esteemed the greatest and most powerful of all the subordinate Deities, as we have great Reason to suppose he did, because that kind of Theology had been some time in vogue in *Egypt*, and spread itself all over those Parts (r); then it is plain, that he applied to them in that manner, only as to the most powerful Mediators, to render the Supreme Deity propitious to his Wishes. What makes this Interpretation appear to me the most probable is, that upon his first Rencounter with God, at the Conclusion of the first of those grand Ceremonies, he addresses him in these Terms; *I have prepared seven Altars, and offered upon each of them a Bullock, and a Ram* (s); but doth not, in either Part, mention the Words, *to Thee*, as he would of course have done, had those Altars been designedly rear'd, or the Victims been offered,

(r) See *Shuckford's Connect.* part iii. p. 327, & seq.

(s) *Num.* xxiii. 4.

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offered, to him : So that he means no more, according to the Theology then reigning, than this ; *I have invoked, by the usual Rites, the seven Planets, or inferior Deities, to whom thou hast committed the Government of the World, to interpose their Mediation with thee, on the behalf of Moab and Midian.* What confirms this Sense still more is, that after he has declared the Tenor of the Divine Answer, in Terms the most opposite to *Balak's* Wishes, that Monarch doth not desire him to apply himself to some other inferior Deities ; there being little Reason to hope, that these should prove more successful than the former ; but only desires him to repeat the same Sacrifices to them, from some other (1) Eminence, which might prove more favourable than this. To which I may add, that the last two Trials are performed at the Desire, and in Compliance with, the superstitious King ; and not by the Prophet's Advice or Choice ; who could not but certainly conclude, from the express Tenor of the first Divine Answer, the Impossibility of obtaining a Reversion of it. However, as this

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Worship

(1) *Num.* xxiii. 13.

Worship and Invocation of the Planets was one of the main Branches of heathenish Idolatry, which God had so solemnly declared his Displeasure against, and done so many Wonders, both in *Egypt*, and other Places, to extirpate out of the Minds of those infatuated Nations; we may reasonably rank it among the unlawful means which *Balaam* made use of upon this Occasion, and which *Moses* mentions under the Name of Divinations or Inchantments. Others he might, and probably did use, which that Lawgiver hath given us no farther Account of, than where he tells us, that when he (*Balaam*) found, at the third Trial, that God was determined to bless *Israel*, he went not, as at other times, to seek for them, but set his Face towards the Wilderness; that is, towards the *Israelitish* Host; and having received the Divine Impulse, delivered his third Blessing on them, in more emphatical and magnificent Terms, than he had done at the two former; till *Balak*, quite out of all Patience at his expressing himself in so high and extraordinary a manner in favour of them, and at his still using some fresh and additional Expressions, of God's peculiar and unalterable

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alterable Favour to them, above all other Nations, at once silenced and dismissed him with Contempt and Disgrace (*u*).

Here *Josephus* acquaints us with some farther, and not improbable, Particulars, relating to this extraordinary Transaction; which *Moses* did not think worth inserting in his concise Narrative; and, among them, *Balaam's* Apology to the *Moabitish* King; in which he assures him, that in all that he had uttered in favour of *Israel*, he was no more than a passive Instrument in the Hand of the Supreme Being; and that he neither had Power to speak or act, nor Knowledge of what he said or did; much less any Remembrance of the Design for which he had been sent for by him, or of his extreme Desire of complying with it; every Word being forced from him by an irresistible Power, and quite contrary to his own Inclination (*w*). This is no more than *Balak* and his Courtiers might easily perceive, by his manner of acting and speaking so like what, we read, was usual, not only with the true

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Prophets

(*u*) *Num.* xxiv. 10, & seq.

(*w*) *Antiq.* l. iv. c. 8.

Prophets among the *Jews*, as well as with the pretended ones, who had apostatized to the Worship of *Baal*; both which had the Character of Madmen given them (*x*); but was also believed to be the Case of the heathenish *Pythoneffes*, and other Oracle-mongers. But the most convincing Argument to them, was his acting a Part so contrary to his Interest and Inclination; and the extreme Mortification and Displeasure we may reasonably suppose him to have shewn at his Disappointment: From all which, both he, his Princes and Allies, might be thoroughly satisfied, that their Designs against *Israel* were defeated by a divine and irresistible Power; and that all their future Attempts would meet with no better, if not worse, Success than the former had done.

However, the Divine Providence took special Care to convince, not only them, but future Ages, of his prophetic Commission, before he left the *Moabitish* Court: For he no sooner had, in some measure, appeased the King's Anger, than he felt himself seized with

(*x*) *De his vid. int. al. 1 Sam. xix. 23, & seq. 1 Kings xviii. 28. 2 Kings ix. 11, & alib. pass.*

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with a fresh prophetic Impulse ; and, having gained the Attention of the whole Assembly, began to extend his Predictions on sundry Kingdoms and People, and to display their various Fates, both by Sea and Land, in so plain a manner, that whatever slight Impression they might make on those that then heard him, yet, by their timely Accomplishment afterwards, they sufficiently shew'd, that they all flowed from the same divine Original (y). Among these none was more remarkable, nor more universally spread all over the East, than that of the miraculous Star that should arise in *Jacob*, and the Sceptre, or Kingdom, that was to be founded in *Israel* (z): The miraculous Completion of which, in the Birth and Reign of the Messiah, tho' at the Distance of above 1450 Years, hath given the greatest Evidence to his prophetic Character, and to all his former Predictions.

All this, however, did not prevent the disappointed Monarch's Resentment from shewing itself afresh ; particularly, in his dismissing the Prophet, not only without any

(y) *Num.* xxiv. 15, & seq.

(z) *Ibid.* Verse 17.

any Récompence, but likewise with this mortifying Speech for it: *I thought indeed to have promoted thee to great Honours; but, lo! the LORD hath kept thee back from Honour (a).* And here had been, in all Likelihood, an End put to all further Hostilities against the *Israelites*, it being scarcely to be doubted, but both the *Moabites* and *Midianites* must have been sufficiently convinced, by all that they had heard and seen, how hazardous, as well as fruitless, all further Attempts must have proved against a People so visibly protected by the Divine Providence: Neither do we find that *Balak*, or any of his Subjects, attempted any thing against them; or that *Moses* was ordered to take any farther Revenge of them for what had passed, than that of stamping a Brand of indelible Ignominy upon them, by excluding them for ever from the *Israelitish* Congregation, and from being admitted to contract any Affinity with them, or to be received as Proselytes into their Commonwealth (b); Which Exclusion entailed a constant Hatred between them, and was the Cause of many

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(a) Num. xxiv. 10, 11, & seq.

(b) Deut. xxiii. 3, 4.

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a bloody War between them (c). It fared indeed much worse with the unhappy *Midianites*, who became quickly after the dreadful Victims of the Prophet's Resentment, and of their own obdurate Enmity against the *Israelites*. But that was for joining with him in one of the most hellish Designs, that could well be hatched against them. For that impious and revengeful Wretch, vexed at Heart at his Disgrace and Disappointment, soon strove to stifle all Impression of what had happened to him, except what might serve his vindictive Malice; and, rightly judging that their Happiness would rise or fall, according as they proved obedient to their Divine Protector, immediately be-thought himself of an Expedient, which would make them curse themselves more effectually, than all his Art and Inchantments could possibly have done; which was, to counsel the *Moabitish* and *Midianitish* Princes to send some of their fairest and most tempting Women, to entice them to Lewdness and Idolatry. His Advice was soon put in Execution, and failed not of answering their Expectation;

(c) *Vid. int. al. Jud. iii. 12, & seq. 2 Sam. viii. 2, & seq. & alib. pass.*

pectation; as there could not indeed be a more effectual Way than that, to deprive them of the Divine Favour and Protection. However, God, who had permitted this Project to succeed so far, that a great Number of *Israelites* had been already debauched, by those fair Tempters, to the Worship of their filthy Deity *Baal-peor*, was soon pleased to interpose, and nip it in the Bud, in a manner no less uniform with his former Dealings towards them, and agreeable to his Divine Attributes. First, by causing all those Delinquents to be put to immediate Death, to the Number of 24,000, as a Determent to the rest; and then by commanding *Moses* forthwith to declare War against the *Midianites*, who had, in all Probability, been the most forward in promoting this Apostasy; for these only are mentioned by *Moses*, as involved in the dreadful Slaughter that ensued (d); whilst the *Moabites*, at least *Balak*, and the greater Part of his People, being deterred, by what had passed, from engaging with them in that pernicious Stratagem, were spared by *Moses*, either on that Account, or,

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(d) Compare Num. xxv. 1, & seq. and 16, & seq. See also ch. xxxi. pass.

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more probably, in Obedience to God's express Command in their Favour, as being descended from *Lot*, *Abraham's* Nephew (e). However that be, the *Israelites* made so horrid a Slaughter of the former, that they destroyed all their Males, slew their five Princes, burnt all their Cities, and brought away an immense Spoil. In this War *Balaam*, the Author of this dreadful Catastrophe, being, by some fatal Impulse, induced to loiter still in *Midian*, met with his just Reward; being slain by the Sword of the *Israelites*, whom his cursed Advice had drawn into so dangerous a Defection, as must, in all Likelihood, have been attended with fatal Consequences, had not the Divine Providence thus timely prevented it (f). We need not therefore wonder, either at his falling a Victim to his ambitious Views, who, in spite of all the Warnings given to him, could yet contrive such an hellish Design against them; or at the sad Catastrophe of the *Midianites*; when we consider, how little Occasion there was for their Rancour and Enmity against,

or

(e) *Deut.* ii. 9.

(f) See *Num.* xxv. *pass.* xxxi. 16, & *seq.* *Deuter.* iv. 3.

or indeed what small Cause they had to fear any thing from, the *Israelitish* Host, after the mutual and hospitable Kindness that had passed between *Moses* and *Jethro*, one of their Princes and Chief Priests, before this unhappy and ill-timed Breach. But to attempt to withdraw them from the Worship of their Divine Protector into that of their filthy and abominable Deity; and that by the Prostitution of their own Daughters; was an Instance of such hellish Malice, as could not but justly deserve the Fate they underwent.

Thus far, Sir, I have, I hope, sufficiently cleared this extraordinary Transaction from all the Cavils which your Opponent had raised against it; and shewed how consistent and uniform every Step of it was with the main and gracious Design of the Divine Providence; and how exactly every thing was calculated to reduce those unhappy Nations from their vain Confidence in their false Deities, the Practice of the superstitious and abominable Rites they used in their Worship of them, as well as to inspire them with a due Sense of his infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness.

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ness, in a Way the best suited to their Capacity, as rational and free Agents, and without the least Infringement on their Liberty, as such. To all which I shall only add a Remark or two more, upon the Whole; namely, 1st, On the great Condescension of the Almighty towards those infatuated Nations, whose Minds being sadly byassed by Prejudice and Custom, as well as by the Craftiness and Artifices of their selfish Priests, who took special Care to calculate their Religion and Superstitions, as best suited with the depraved Taste of their Votaries, were, in a great measure, incapable of being reduced by Arguments drawn from Reason; and could only be wrought upon by such strong Impulses of Sense, and interesting Motives, as these I have been animadverting upon, and which were indeed the fittest to be set in Opposition to, and to preponderate, those artful and illusory ones, by which their Minds had been till then captivated by those juggling Guides. The next is, His extreme Goodness towards them, in delaying to make them Examples of his Justice, for the Determent of others, till their incorrigible Obstinacy plainly proved them to be unworthy of any

farther Tokens of his Forbearance. This I have shewn, in my first Essay, to have been the Case of the *Egyptians*, notwithstanding all the Wonders which he wrought among them (g); and will no less plainly appear, upon an impartial Review, to be the Case of *Moab* and *Midian* here. An ill-grounded Jealousy conceived against a People, who, by all that God had already done for them, appeared to have been designed by his Providence to become the happy Possessors of the Land of *Canaan*, instead of the old Inhabitants, who had polluted it with the most abominable Idolatries, and the vilest and most inhuman Rites, engages those two infatuated Nations to enter into an unjust and hostile Confederacy against them; to render which the more effectual, *Balaam*, a celebrated Prophet and Inchanter, is sent for, to supply, by his Curses, what was wanting in them, either of Courage or Strength, to destroy them. He refuses their first Presents and Promises, telling the Messenger, that the Supreme Being had taken them into his Protection, and would not permit him to attempt

(g) See before, p. 128, & seq. 144, & seq.

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tempt any thing to their Hurt. *Balak* sends a second Embassy, consisting of a greater Number of his Nobles; and *Balaam* is, under some Restrictions, permitted to go with them, that they might be so many credible Witnesses of the extraordinary Rencounter he was to meet with in his Way, as a proper Check to his perverse and ambitious Views, and a proper Preparative to his *Moabitish* Retinue, for the Disappointment that was to ensue. His Beast is thrice stopped in the Way, in a strange and unusual manner, at the Sight of an Angel, and forced to crouch at last under the Weight of its Rider's Blows before their Eyes; and being, on the sudden, endowed with an human Voice, reproves him for his unjust Treatment of her; upon which his Eyes, till then with-held from seeing the heavenly Messenger, behold him with his Sword drawn: He hears himself severely reproved for still entertaining such perverse and opposite Views to the Designs of Providence, and particularly for his Cruelty to his own Beast, to whose Deflexion he owed the Preservation of his Life, seeing he stood there ready to slay him, had not the Divine Providence directed the innocent Beast to avoid

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the Danger, as often as he stood in his Way (b). In all which there was nothing, as I have elsewhere observed, but what was consistent with the common Belief of those superstitious Nations; and the artful Practices of their Diviners and Priests, which, whether real or pretended, that is, whether wrought by the Help of Demons, or the Effect of Juggling, or mere Delusion (a Point not yet sufficiently cleared), seldom failed of making a deep Impression on the Beholders. Nothing therefore could well be more aptly and condescendingly calculated, than this real and twofold Miracle, to convince the superstitious *Moabites*, in their own Way, that if *Balaam* did, in the Sequel, thwart, instead of complying with, their Monarch's Request, it was owing to the Divine Interposition, which it was out of his Power to resist; and, at the same time, nothing could be a properer Determent to the Prophet, from cherishing his ambitious Views, than this miraculous Encounter, and the Angel's severe Reproof and Interdiction. Again, when *Balak's* pompous Promises to him had so far obliterated those Impressions,

(b) See before, p. 182, & seq.

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Impressions, as to set him upon the trying the Power of his Inchantments, in order to oblige that Monarch, he is foiled again and again in his Attempts; and forced, in spite of his Heart, to pronounce the noblest and most endearing Blessings on those, on whom he was hired, and earnestly wished, to have poured the bitterest Curses; whilst *Balak* hath the singular Mortification to find every fresh Trial he makes of his Art, to come out more irksome and discouraging; till his Disdain and Despair provoke him to dismiss him out of his Presence and Territory. Lastly, *Balaam*, irritated at his Disgrace and Disappointment, forgets all the former Warnings; and, in a Fit of Resentment, devises that impious Stratagem, which he hopes will draw down that Curse upon *Israel*, which his Inchantments could not effect; and, by his dreadful End, and the universal Slaughter of the *Midianites*, his infatuated Accomplices, God gives a fresh and irrefragable Proof to *Moab*, and all the Kingdoms round about, of his unerring Providence, his Power, Justice, and Goodness, in defeating and punishing the impious Attempts of the Enemies of his chosen People, and sparing the *Moabitish*

Nation, either as less deep in the Guilt of the last execrable Plot, or out of a tender Regard to their Consanguinity with the Offspring of the great Father of the Faithful. But even in these Instances of his Rigour on those implacable Enemies of *Israel*, it is plain that he did not let them feel the Effects of it, till they had resisted all those rational means which he had been using, in order to reclaim them; whilst, on the other hand, he appears to have been no less severe towards the offending *Israelites*, in the sudden and exemplary Death of those 24,000 Miscreants, who had been drawn away to the Worship of *Baal-peor*, than gracious and merciful to the rest, by putting such an effectual and speedy Stop, by that means, to the further spreading of that Defection and Apostasy (i).

Before I dismiss this Subject, I must beg Leave to take off another Difficulty, which occurs in *Moses's* Relation of this sudden Defection to *Baal-peor*; and which, tho' not taken Notice of by your Antagonist, may chance to start in his Way, if what hath been

(i) *Conf. Num. xxv. & xxxi. pass.*

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been said above should incline him to give it a second Reading. It is where that Law-giver is ordered by God (as our and most other Versions render it) to take all the Heads of the People, and to hang them up against the Sun, in order to appease the Divine Anger (*k*): Which must appear exceeding harsh and unjust, according to that Version, it being unreasonable to suppose, that all the *Israelitish* Chiefs could be engaged in that Apostasy, or could deserve so severe a Punishment, if they were not; whereas the Words of the Original, if rightly understood, and compared with the following Verse, import no more than this: Appoint all the Heads of *Israel* to sit in Judgment over their respective Subordinates, and order all that were found guilty of it to be executed out of hand; or, as the Text hath it, in the Face of this Sun; that is, on that very Day (*l*): Which was the most expeditious Way that could be thought on to bring those Delinquents to Tryal, and condign Punishment,

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(*k*) *Num. xxv. 4.*

(*l*) *Vid. Targ. Onkel. R. Salom. & Abarban. in loc. Jun. Le Scen. & al. & Un. Hist. 8vo. vol. iii. p 432, & seq. (Z),*

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nishment; as well as to put a speedy Stop to the Infection.

The next Point your Opponent undertakes to criticize upon, being the miraculous Solstice obtained by *Joskua*, in favour of the *Gibeonites*, his new Allies; and he having offered nothing against the Authenticity of that supernatural Event, but what hath been fully answered by the Authors of the Book last quoted in the Margin; I shall gladly refer you to it, for an Answer to all his Objections, and pass on to the next Point in Dispute between him and you.



ESSAY



ESSAY III.

LETTER IV.

Containing a rational Account of the total Defeat of Jabin, King of Hazor, and his numberless Confederates, by the Israelites; Joshua xi. pass. and answering the Objections raised against the Probability of that signal Exploit, by proper Observation on the Art of War, and military Discipline, of the Hebrews.

S I R,

I Do not at all wonder at the Difficulties which your incredulous Neighbours raise against the Probability of this remarkable Transaction. The swift and miraculous Suc-

cess which *Joshua*, and his *Hebrew* Host, had so lately met with, against the confederate Forces of the Southern *Canaanites*, by which he was become Master of all that large Tract of Ground, would, one might reasonably think, have effectually deterred these Northern Kingdoms from the like hopeless and dangerous Attempt. How could they imagine it possible for their Forces, how numerous and valiant soever, to stop the *Hebrew* General's Career, whom they knew to have stopt that of the two Luminaries, their two grand Deities, in the midst of theirs; and to have engaged the very Elements to overwhelm so many Myriads of the flying Confederates with Hailstones; whilst that Day was miraculously lengthened, to give him Time to cut off their discomfited Remains (a)? What Help could they hope for from their Deities, who had thus far already contributed to the utter Excision of their Southern Votaries, and suffered the *Israelites* to destroy all their Temples, Altars, and Images (b)? In so desperate a Situation would they not more probably have choien to abandon their

(a) *Josh. x. pass.*

(b) *See before, pag. 138, & seq.*

their whole Country to the irresistible Force of such an Enemy, rather than rush into unavoidable Destruction, by attempting to oppose him?

This Difficulty, how great soever it may appear, will quickly vanish, if we consider, that these were, like the rest, given up by God to a judicial Infatuation, and to a determinate Refusal of all Offers of Peace, on the Conditions required of them (c). Nor is it indeed to be much wondered at, that they should be so unanimous in their Resolution of dying Sword in Hand, in Defence of their Liberty, Religion, and Country; seeing the same Spirit reigned almost everywhere among those Nations; and those among them were held in the greatest Contempt and Abhorrence, that preferred not Death, in so interesting a Cause, to an ignominious Servitude, on such dishonourable Terms, as they esteemed the Exchange of their old idolatrous Worship for that of the God of *Israel*, whom they looked upon, by this time, as an incensed and inexorable Judge,

(c) *Josh.* xi. 12. 19, 20. See before, p. 129, & seq.

Judge, rather than as an Object worthy their Adoration and Love. In this desperate Situation, what could be expected from them, but that their Resolutions should prove equally desperate; and that they should try, by one bold Stroke of their united Force, either to save their All, or perish in the Attempt?

Accordingly we find, that whilst *Joshua* was refreshing his Army, after his Conquest of Southern *Canaan*, at his standing Camp at *Gilgal*, on the West Side of *Jordan*, *Jabin*, King of *Hazor*, one of the most powerful of all the Northern Princes (*d*), engaged not only several petty Kings, but a great Number of States, both on the Hills and Plains (*e*), to enter into a most powerful Confederacy against him. And though a prodigious Number of the more Pusillanimous chose to abandon their Country to the irresistible Conqueror, and seek for some more peaceful Settlements in distant Countries (*A*), rather than run the Risk of their Lives in

(*d*) *Josh. xi. 10.*

(*e*) *Ibid. Verse 1, & seq.*

(*A*) Accordingly, we of them removed thence, are told, that great Shoals some into *Egypt*, and some into

in a fruitless Opposition; yet there were still enough left, of a more determinate Spirit, to make

into *Africa*; where they spread themselves far and wide, built a great Number of Cities, and retained the antient Language of *Canaan*, during a long Series of Ages (1). *Procopius* also mentions two white Columns, reared by them, in the City of *Tingis*, now *Tangier*, a City of their founding, and Capital of the Province of *Tingitania*, on which was carved an Inscription, in the *Phœnician* Language and Character, to this Purpose; *We are Fugitives, that fled to save ourselves from the great Robber Joshua, the Son of Nun.* *St. Austin* farther assures us, that the *Africans* boasted themselves to be descended from the antient *Canaanites*, and preserved their old *Phœnician* Language (2); the *Punic* being generally al-

lowed to be very near the *Hebrew* and *Phœnician*.

They are likewise supposed by the Learned to have come in Colonies into *Greece*, *Cilicia*, and *Lesser Asia*, and most of the Islands of the *Ægean* and *Mediterranean* Sea, quite to *Cadiz* in *Spain* (3): And, if we may credit the *Jewish* Writers, they spread themselves as far as *Germany*, *Sclavonia*, &c (4). *Arrian* likewise tells us, that, among the many Embassadors that waited upon *Alexander the Great* at *Babylon*, some came from *Africa*, that were of the *Canaanitish* Race; and the *Babylonish Gemara* adds, that they came to beg of him to reinstate them in their antient Seats, whence the *Israelites* had driven them (5).

(1) *Procop. de bell. Vandal. l. ii. c. 10.*

(2) *Exposit. inchoat. in Epist. ad Roman.*

(3) See *Bochart. de Colon. & Serm. Phœnic. Selden. de Jur. Nat. l. vii. c. 8. Calmet. Dissertat. de Canaanit.*

(4) *Gemar. Hieros. ap. Seld. ubi sup.*

(5) *Tractat. Sanhedr. c. 2. vid. Selden. ubi sup.*

make up an Army of 300,000 Men, 10,000 Horse, and 2000 Chariots; if *Josephus* may be credited (f): And fewer we can hardly suppose them to have been, seeing the Text compares them to the Sands of the Sea Shore for Multitude; and makes likewise Mention of their numerous Horse, and Chariots of War (g). And such a threatening Appearance they made, at their general Rendezvous, that the *Hebrew* Chief, though hitherto so accustomed to Victory, seems here to have wanted fresh Assurance from God, of his proving equally successful against this, as he had lately been against the Southern, Confederacy. *Be not afraid of them*, says God to him; *for To-morrow about this time I will deliver them up to thee, to be all slain before Israel; and thou shalt bough their Horses, and burn their Chariots with Fire* (h).

But here your Opponent raises a very considerable Difficulty against the Possibility of *Joshua's* (whom he supposes to have been still at his Camp at *Gilgal*) reaching them, in so short a time, to the Place of their Rendezvous

(f) *Antiq. lib. v. c. 1.*

(g) *Josh. xi. 4.*

(h) *Ibid. Verse 6.*

vous at the Waters of *Merom*; which he likewise supposes to be the *Samachonitish* Lake, situate about half-way between that of *Genezareth*, and the Spring-head of the River *Jordan*. For, according to that twofold Supposition, he and his Army must have marched at least an hundred Miles, and a great Part of the Way over high Mountains, and narrow Defiles, in that short time; which is evidently impossible. Your Friends may indeed wonder, that the sacred Historian should have given us so confused and imperfect an Account of that signal Victory; especially if *Joshua* himself was, as he is supposed by most Interpreters, the Penman of it; for, as he was so consummate a General, it might be reasonably expected, that he would have, if not embellished his Relation, yet at least been more particular in describing the Circumstances both of his March, and of his engaging the Enemy. But they ought to have remembred, that it is the peculiar Character, I might have called it Excellency, of the sacred Historians, to relate Facts with a surprising unaffected Simplicity; and, in all Actions of this Nature, to avoid, as much as possible, entering into such Particulars, as

relate to their own Prudence, Conduct, or Valour; lest they should appear to assume any Share of that Glory to themselves, which was intirely due to their Heavenly Protector. Hence it is, that the inspired Writer here thought fit to confine himself to the two most material Points; *viz.* The Divine Promise of a complete Victory over that numerous, and so much dreaded, Host; and the Event of it in their total Defeat. Other Circumstances of that Battle might indeed have convey'd to us a clearer Idea of the Conduct and Bravery of the *Hebrew General*, but could not have given us so lively an one of the Display of the Divine Power, in favour of his People, as the representing him here as the sole Author of the whole Transaction; and ascribing the whole Glory of it, where it was most justly due.

However, as *Gilgal*, the standing Camp of the *Israelites*, was at too great a Distance from the Waters of *Merom*, where the Confederate Forces were rendezvous'd, for *Joshua* to reach it in so short a time; whether we suppose the latter to be the *Samachonitish Lake*, or,
as

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as I shall shew by-and-by, some Plain much nearer than the former; it were absurd to suppose the Divine Promise to have been made to him before his decamping from it, and not rather upon his being come within a short Day's March from, if not in full View of, the Enemy's Army. The Text seems plainly to be in favour of this latter Supposition; for *Joshua* could hardly, before that time, be so sufficiently apprised of their Number and Strength, as to want this fresh Assurance from God: Neither will Reason permit us to think, that so old and experienced a General would have suffered such a grand Confederacy to be made against him, without using all possible Expedition to go and oppose them; especially as so great a Tract of South *Canaan*, which he had lately conquered, lay between him and them; and being now, in some measure, destitute of its old Inhabitants, might have easily become a Prey to them.

How long he and his Army were in marching from *Gilgal* to *Merom*, the Text doth not tell us: *Josephus* says only five Days

Days (B); which, if true, plainly shews that those Places must have been much nearer to each other; and consequently, that the *Merom* Waters here spoken of could not be the *Samachonitish* Lake above-mentioned, as some Commentators conjecture; for neither could such an Army, as his must be supposed to have been, have reached it in twice that time, it being, as I hinted before, above an hundred Miles over high Mountains, and narrow Passes: Nor is it likely, that the confederate Army would choose that for the Place of their Rendezvous; it being almost at the farthest End, North of their Country; and have left so vast a Territory on the South exposed to the Enemy.

What hath given Birth to that Mistake is, that *Josephus* mentions the City of *Hazor*, the

(B) *Josephus* calls the Place where they engaged, *Berothe* (1); but that is most likely a Mistake of the Transcriber for *Merothe*, or, according to the Hebrew Termination *Meroth* (2); which he tells us is one of the Towns of *Galilee*.

(1) *Antiq. lib. v. c. 1.*

(2) *Mas. Comment. in Josh. xi.*

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the Capital of *Jabin*, the chief of the confederate Kings, as situate upon that Lake; but, besides that he doth not hint any thing like the Battle having been fought there, is it not very absurd to suppose, that so politic a King, and who was the chief Promoter of the Confederacy, should choose his own Territory to be the Scene of War; and a Plain, so near his Metropolis, for the Field of Battle? Is it not much more reasonable to suppose, that both he, and his Allies, would haste all they could, to meet the Enemy, before he could penetrate into any of their Territories? Hence it is generally concluded, that the *Merom*, here spoken of, is the same which *Eusebius* calls *Merus*, and places at about twelve Miles Distance from *Sebastey*, or *Samaria*, towards *Dothaim*, and on this Side of the Torrent of *Kishon*, and in the Neighbourhood of Mount *Thabor*, and the Waters of *Megiddo*, and the City of *Thaanach*: For upon that same Spot it was, that was afterwards fought the famous Battle between *Sisera*, General of *Jabin*, King of *Hazor*, and *Barak*, the Hebrew Chief, about 130 Years after; in which the former, tho' vastly superior,

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perior, was totally cut off (i). For there was a very important Pass, which guarded the Entrance into *Galilee*, and so into *Phœnice*; or from thence into South *Canaan*. It was therefore of the utmost Consequence to the Confederates to secure it, seeing the Loss of it would open, as it actually did, after their Defeat, a Way into all the Northern Part, which they inhabited, quite into upper *Galilee*. Now this Spot being at most but between fifty or sixty Miles from *Gilgal*, it was easy for *Joshua*, and his Army, to reach it in less than five Days, considering the expeditious Way which the *Hebrews* had of marching their Armies, not only in different Columns, more or less numerous, as the Ground would allow, but even in small Bodies, whenever they could do it safe from the Attacks and Insults of their Enemies; as they could, on this particular Occasion, through all the South Part of *Canaan*, where they had already destroyed all that could possibly annoy them; and had, in all Probability, left here and there a Garison, at proper Places, to secure either their March, or a Retreat, in

(i) *Judg.* iv. *pass.* v. 19.

in case of Need. For it is to be observed here, that they were encumbered with neither Artillery nor Baggage, that could retard their Speed. They took nothing with them but their Arms, which were either the Sling, Sword, Lance, or Bow; all light of Carriage; besides their Provisions; which, being chiefly of the dry Kind, as Bread, parched Corn, Peas, dried Figs, Raisins, &c. they easily carried a sufficient Quantity about them, for the present Occasion; or, in case of a long March, they had their Asses, Mules, and other Beasts of Carriage, for the Purpose; by which means they marched, with a surprising Expedition; from one End of the Country to the other. But of this I shall give as remarkable an Instance, in the last of these Essays, as is to be met with in any History, either antient or modern. I must still add one peculiar Advantage they had, in this respect, above other Nations, from the excellent Discipline established among them by their inspired Lawgiver, and improved by his worthy Successor, the present *Hebrew* Chief, *Joshua*; and that was, that every Man that was able to bear Arms, that is, from twenty to sixty Years of Age, was obliged to be in-

rolled in the Muster-Roll of his own Tribe, and to appear under the Standard of it, with his Provisions, and military Accoutrements, upon the first Summons, under the severest Penalties. These Muster-Rolls were carefully preserved, not only by every Tribe; but a general one of the Whole was likewise to be kept in the Hands of the chief Judge, or General. The former of those Rolls was to be called over at the Head of each respective Tribe, to see that none were absent, but such as were detained by some unavoidable Impediment, as Sickness, Lameness, and the like. Here, likewise, as many as had married a Wife, built a new House, planted a Vineyard, &c. within the Year, having made good their Claim before the Head of the Tribe, were likewise dismissed to their own Home, and set down as such in the Muster-Book: After which the rest were to march to the Place of Rendezvous, under their respective Heads of Thousands, Hundreds, and Fifties. Here their Names were called afresh, to see whether any were missing; and then the whole Amount was given to the head Commander. So that there could hardly be any that dared desert from his Colours,

Colours, because they knew not whither to go without Danger, no other Tribe daring to admit them within their Roll; and they being branded in their own for Run-aways, and liable to be punished with Death, as soon as found. They had still another powerful Tie; viz. their Family: For all the Men were obliged to marry soon after they had attained to their twentieth Year, and were generally fruitful. But in case of Desertion, should they by good Chance have escaped from being taken, yet they must be for ever banished from their Parents, Wives, and Children; besides living, perhaps, under some Servitude, in a strange Place, and in constant Fear of being discovered. To have fled into an Enemy's Country for Safety, was not only equally dangerous, but much more dreaded; because that rescinded them from the Commonwealth of *Israel*, as Traitors and Apostates; which was esteemed the greatest Curse that could befall them. Upon all these Accounts, Desertion was so rare, that they could trust their Men to march through their own Country, without that military Regularity, which was commonly observed by other Nations; and, on all Emer-

gencies that required a more than ordinary Expedition, permit them to divide themselves into small Bodies, go over Mountains, or fetch a Compass about, or take any other Method, that would bring them soonest to the Place of Rendezvous. It was, therefore, by this excellent Discipline, that the *Hebrew* Armies, tho' sometimes very numerous, were able to make such surprizing quick Marches, either over Mountains and Defiles, or by fetching a Compass about, as to come upon their Enemies, when they least dreamed of their being so nigh; and by attacking them on the sudden, on two, or three, sometimes on all, Sides, in distinct Bodies, to give them a total Overthrow. Upon the Whole then, though *Gilgal* was at least an hundred Miles Distance from *Hazor*, the Capital of the chieftest of the confederate Kings; yet the Text tells us, that when these last were assembled together, they marched their Army to the Waters of *Merom*, in order to engage the *Israelites* (k); which, as I have shewed before, were not those of the Lake *Samachon*, as your Friend and others suppose, but of *Kishon*,

(k) *Josh.* xi. 5.

Kishon, or, as they are elsewhere stiled, the Waters of *Megiddo*. To this I beg Leave to add one Argument more; viz. that *Joshua* is said, in the Text, to have pursued the Enemy, after their Defeat, to *Great Zidon*, to *Mizrephoth-majim*, and to the Valley of *Mizpeh*, on the East. Now that *Mizpeh* was in the Tract of Mount *Gilead*, is plain from the Story of *Laban* and *Jacob*, who gave it both those Names (*Genes.* xxxi. 49.): And it is as plain, that it lies Eastward of the Waters of *Merom*, or Torrent of *Kishon*, but full South from the Lake *Samachon*; and therefore this last could not be the Waters of *Merom*, mentioned in the Text, but those of the River *Kishon* (C). And accordingly we find

(C) To this there can be but one thing objected; viz. That the Text places *Mizpeh* under Mount *Hermion* (1), which lies above Fifty Miles North of *Gilead*, and North-east of the *Samachonitish* Lake; so that it cannot be that in the Land of *Gilead*; for, according to that Situation,

it lies East from the Lake, and from *Zidon*, as the Text places it, in the 8th Verse. But, allowing that, it will not follow, that the Battle was fought near that Lake; but that *Jabin*, King of *Hazor*, prevailed on all the Nations, from the *Hittites* that lived under that Mount, and consequently

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(1) *Josh.* xi. 3.

find *Zidon* on the North of that River ; and the *Mizrephoth-majim*, the other Place where *Joshua* pursued them, may be reasonably supposed to have lain Westward towards the Sea. For the Word signifies the Burnings of Waters ; and is commonly understood either of Salt-pits, or melting of Sand to make Glass. And both these Manufactures were carried on, along the Western Coasts, about *Acra*, or *Ptolemais*, but especially the latter ; the Sand of the River *Belus*, which falls into the Sea not far from it, being reckoned excellent

frequently were situate the farthest North from South *Canaan*, quite down to those who inhabited the South Parts, from the Lake *Genezareth* Eastward, to the Borders of *Dor* on the West, to join in the Confederacy with him ; that is, that he engaged all the Nations about him, quite to the very Borders of South *Canaan*, to engage in that War. In Revenge of which, *Joshua*, having totally defeated them, pursued them to the furthest Part of their respective

Territories ; that is, to *Mizrephoth-majim* West, to *Zidon* North, and to this *Mizpeh* under *Hermion* Eastward : Which I gladly subscribe to, because the Text observes, that after he had pursued them thus far North, he turned back, and took and burned the City of *Hazor* (2). But this cannot affect what I have said, either of the Field of Battle, or of *Joshua's* attacking the Enemy by distinct Bodies ; but rather confirms it.

(2) *Josh.* xi. 10.

excellent for that Use, and said to have ministered the first Hint to that Invention.

Here then we have the three Points to which he pursued them; viz. to *Mizpeh*, Eastward; to *Zidon*, Northward; and to *Mizrephoth-majim*, Westward: For the South being already conquered, it is not to be supposed they would venture to flee to any Part of it. We may therefore reasonably conclude, that this was the Scene of that memorable Action; and that it lay near the Confines of both: And I think it highly probable, that the River *Kishon* did, at this time, divide the Southern *Canaan*, conquered by *Joshua*, from the Northern, still unsubdued; and hither it was that the *Hebrew* Chief led his Forces to oppose them (l); and there it was that he gained the signal Victory, mentioned a little after, which enabled him, in four or five Years, to complete the Conquest of the whole Northern Tract (m).

There remains but one Difficulty unanswered; and that is, How *Joshua*, with his small

(l) *Josh.* xi. 7.

(m) *Ibid.* Ver. 8, & seq.

small flying Army, for such it might justly be deemed, in comparison of that of the Confederates, could give them such a total Overthrow, and chase them so many different Ways, and at so great a Distance from each other; and cut them off, that none of them should remain, but those few that fled into fortified Cities; burn all their warlike Chariots; hamstring their Horses; and open to himself a Way thro' all that hilly Country, quite to the City of *Hazor*, which stood above fifty Miles farther North; without meeting, that we read of, any farther Opposition from the Enemy? But here likewise the sacred Historian wholly ascribes the Glory of the whole Expedition to God, who delivered up that numerous Host into his Hand (d); and leaves us to guess at the Methods which the *Hebrew* General took to accomplish it, by some few Hints interspersed, as it were accidentally, in the Text; but yet sufficient to remove all Appearance of Improbability in the Relation.

1st, then, As to the prodigious Superiority of the Confederates, with respect to Number,

(d) *Josh.* xi. 8.

ber, it is universally allowed to be a Dis-
 vantage, rather than Advantage ; not only
 as it is apt to inspire them with too much
 Confidence, Security, and Negligence ; but
 likewise, as it often proves an unwieldy and
 dead Weight ; especially when engaged against
 a General, who knows how to choose his
 Ground, so as to render the greater Part of it
 useless ; for the Truth of which we need not
 seek for a more pregnant Instance, than in
 the two Armies of *Darius* and *Alexander*
the Great. 2dly, By the Hint the Text
 gives us, of *Joshua's* pursuing the flying Ene-
 my, quite to *Great Zidon*, to *Mizrephoth-*
majim, and to the Valley of *Mizpeh* ; and
 smiting them, till none remained ; that is, as
 the Text plainly imports, till none remained
 undispersed ; we may draw this very proba-
 ble Inference from it ; viz. that *Joshua* had
 divided his Army into several distinct Bodies,
 both to attack them on different Sides, and to
 pursue and kill those that fled : For that was
 a Method much in vogue in those antient
 times, seeing we find it practised as early as
 the time of *Abraham* (p). Another Remark

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(p) *Genesis* xiv. 15.

I would make on those flying and separate Bodies, is, that they generally aimed at, and were designed to surprise, the Enemy, and fall unexpectedly upon them on as many Sides as they could ; by which means such a sudden Panic was generally convey'd from the Out-guards to the main Body of the Army, as seldom failed of being attended with their total Overthrow. The many Instances of this kind of successful Stratagems, in *Barak*, *Gideon*, *Saul*, and other *Jewish* Chiefs ; and among the *Maccabees*, in later Ages ; are not only standing Proofs of its Use and Excellence, but give us a moral Assurance, that *Joshua*, who was so well versed in all the Arts of War, would not omit putting this in Practice, whenever a fair Opportunity offered. And where can the Improbability be, that such a vast Army as that of the Confederates, who, in all Likelihood, lay negligently encamped, trusting chiefly in their Number and Strength, should afford him such an one as he could wish ; especially if he took the Opportunity of coming upon them in the Night, and attacking them upon the first Dawn of the Day ? Did not *Gideon*, with his three hundred Men, by much the same well-

well-concerted Stratagem, inject an universal Panic into the numerous Host of *Midian*, *Amalek*, and their Confederates, in the Dead of Night; and discomfit them on the next Morning (q)? Did not *Barak*, with 30,000 Men, defeat *Sisera*, and his numerous Host, with his 900 Iron Chariots of War (r)? And *Saul*, with an Army of 300,000 Men, surprise the *Ammonitish* Camp before *Jabesh-Gilead*, and cut them all in Pieces (s)? And did not his Son *Jonathan*, with only his Armour-bearer, by luckily surprising one of the Stations of the warlike *Philistines*, inject such a Terror into their whole Camp, as occasioned their total Defeat (t)? For, in the general Confusion and Mistrust that reigned through those numerous Hosts, which was still much greater, when they consisted of various Nations, whether Confederates or Auxiliaries, they commonly fell foul upon one another, with such desperate Fury, that the Enemy had little else to do, but to stand still and see them sheath their Weapons into each other's Side.

(q) *Judg.* vii. 12, & seq.

(r) *Ibid.* iv. pass.

(s) *1 Sam.* xi. pass.

(t) *Ibid.* xiv. pass.

Side. How much more grievous must the Horror and Despair of these Northern *Canaanites* be, at this unhappy Juncture, to see themselves surpris'd, and on all Sides surrounded with such an irresistible Enemy; all the Union of their Confederacy at once broken; their Politics defeated; and their united Force dissolved; by the universal Distrust and Dread which reigns among them; whilst every Nation, I might almost say every Individual, forgetting the Ties of common Alliance, can think on nothing but of seeking their own Safety, by the most dangerous and desperate means? Such, I believe, will easily be allowed to be the necessary Consequence of such ill-concerted Confederacies, when acting in Opposition to a Force, which, how inferior soever in Number, is so strongly cemented by one common Interest; directed by a wise and experienced Commander; kept up by a good martial Discipline; and inspirited with such frequent Divine Assurances of Victory. What Wonder is there then, that the *Hebrew Army*, with so many great Advantages, nay, with every Advantage but that of Numbers, if that be really one, should thus totally rout and disperse that
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of so many ill-united and intimidated Confederates ; make such a dreadful Slaughter among them that fled ; pursue them to the very farthestmost Borders of their respective Territories ; and, in their Return, make themselves Masters of every Part of that Northern Tract ? But we may further remember, that immediately after their signal Defeat, *Joshua*, cutting off all the Men that he could come at, hamstringing all their Horses, and destroying all their Chariots, in which it is likely their chief Strength consisted, put it wholly out of their Power to make any farther Defence against him.

The only Difficulty that can be started, therefore, against this signal Transaction, is, that such a numerous Host, as that of the Confederates, who had with them such Multitudes of Horse, and warlike Chariots, and could send Scouts enough abroad, to give them Intelligence of what passed, should suffer themselves to be surprised by the *Hebrew* Chief ; and, what is more amazing, by an old threadbare Stratagem, that had been in Use even since *Abraham's* Days ; and had been so lately practised with Success by him

in the Relief of *Gibeon*, and the Defeat of the confederate Army of *Canaanites*, that were then besieging it on all Sides. Was not all this enough to put them upon keeping a better Guard around them than usual, to avoid the like Surprise? To this I answer, That nothing is more common, than for such large Armies to trust so far to their Numbers, Strength, advantageous Situation, and the Fortifications of their Camp, as to become quite negligent of this main Point. We meet with numberless Instances of this, both in sacred and profane History; and some of them of a much more modern Date. These Confederates, having formed their several Camps in the properest manner, and, as is most likely, surrounded them with their armed Chariots, perhaps two or three Rows deep, and posted their Vanguards about them, might think themselves sufficiently secured from any sudden Attack, without troubling themselves about any further Precautions. This was the Case, we find, above 200 Years after, of the confederate *Midianites*, *Amalekites*, and their Eastern Allies; whom the sacred Historian represents as lying negligently scattered about like Locusts, when *Gideon* fell

fell suddenly upon them, in the Night, and gave them such a total Overthrow, that they dared not shew their Faces against *Israel*, for some Scores of Years after (u). I have already mentioned other Instances out of the sacred Books, and could produce a much greater out of profane Historians, were it needful.

But, 2dly, *Joshua*, who was become Master of all South *Canaan*, might easily put it out of the Power of the Enemy to receive any Intelligence of his Approach, by causing all the Passes and Defiles to be closely guarded. For, as I observed before, the Battle was fought near the Frontiers, between North and South *Canaan*; though on which Side I will not pretend to affirm. It was easy therefore to prevent their Scouts, or even any of his Deserters, if any such there had been, to bring them Notice of his March or Route: So that hearing nothing from any Side, they might easily imagine that he dared not come to attack them.

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3dly,

(u) *Judg.* vii. 12, & seq.

3dly, I likewise observed, that he usually marched his Army in different Columns; and that not only for the sake of Expedition, but likewise that he might attack the Enemy on different Sides. It was easy therefore for him to order one Corps to march towards them, by the nearest Way, but somewhat more slowly; whilst he ordered the rest of his Army to fetch a Compass about, both on the Right and Left; and, by a speedier March, to arrive time enough to fall unexpectedly upon them, on the Flank or Rear, whilst these attacked them in Front; which could not fail of throwing them into Disorder and Confusion. Let me add, that supposing their Camp ever so well fortified, *Joshua* had still another Stratagem to play against them, as he had lately done to the Inhabitants of *Ai* (w); viz. by making a feint Attack with one Body, in order to draw them out of their Intrenchments, in Pursuit of them; and then falling suddenly upon them, on the Flank and Rear.

By all therefore that hath been said upon this memorable Transaction, you may plainly

(w) *Josh.* viii. 3, & seq.

ly see, that there was nothing done in it, but what might have been performed by any other experienced Chief, in the common martial Way of Conquest; tho' he had never been favoured with such Encouragements, and Assurances of Success, as God was pleased so frequently to give to *Joshua*, and his Troops. It is therefore no Wonder, that the sacred Writers, instead of dwelling on a long Detail of the Arts and Stratagems that were used by the *Hebrew* Chiefs, choose rather to ascribe the whole Glory of all their signal Victories, and the happy Consequences of them, to the Divine Providence, that so visibly prospered their Arms; since it was chiefly owing to their sure Trust and Confidence in those repeated Assurances, that they fought so valiantly and successfully against Enemies that wholly relied on their Number and Strength, and on the Assistance of their imaginary Deities; and who, by their detestable Worship of them, had not only forfeited all Title to the Protection of God, but had made themselves worthy of his most severe Punishments. Nevertheless it would be absurd to infer from thence, that *Joshua* neglected any

Art or Stratagem, that could either secure or facilitate the promised Conquest; for that were an Abuse of, rather than a Reliance on, the Divine Assistance; and such as we have no Reason to suspect him to have been capable of. If therefore those Arts and Means are not recorded in the Text, it cannot be supposed to be done with any other View, than to intimate to us the small Efficacy they must all have had, without such a steady Reliance on the one Side, and God's Blessing on the other; than which nothing could be more proper to keep up their Confidence in him, and to fill them with the most grateful Sense, for all the Success they had hitherto, or should hereafter be blessed with; whilst, on the other hand, instead of arrogating any Share of the Glory of it, they looked upon themselves only as the mere Instruments of his Providence, and Executors of his Divine Will. Agreeable to this was that extraordinary Precaution which he was pleased to take, on a like Occasion, with regard to *Gideon*, and his 30,000 Men, when he made him dismiss them, all but 300 tried Men; viz. lest they should boast, that their own
Valour

Valour or Strength had obtained the promised Victory (x). Where you'll permit me to observe, once more, that though *Gideon* had had all the Assurance he could wish for given him, of his totally defeating the *Midianites*, and their Confederates, and delivering his People from their Yoke, yet he doth not venture to fall upon them, till his Reason furnishes him with a Stratagem; which, by injecting a general Panic among them, would make them become an easier Prey to his conquering Sword (y). And indeed the Author of *Ecclesiasticus*, and the inspired Writer of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, would have had little Reason to extol *Joshua*, *Gideon*, and other *Hebrew* Worthies (z), if all their Merit had consisted in a blind Obedience to God's Directions, without contributing so much as one single Thought, or forming one Design, for the more effectual Execution of his Orders. But that never was the Case of those *Hebrew* Worthies; and the next Letter but one will furnish you with a most signal Instance of the contrary.

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(x) *Judg.* vii. 2, & seq.

(y) *Ibid.* 16, & seq.

(z) *Eccclus.* xlii. 1, & seq. *Hebr.* xi. 32, & seq.

But here I am aware of an Objection, that will hardly fail of being started by your Opponents, as it hath been by many others, in the same Way of thinking; viz. that such Stratagems for surprising and routing an Enemy, cannot but appear below the Character of those *Hebrew* Chiefs, and much more so of the Divine Providence, that is said to have directed and prospered them; especially considering how despicably all such Artifices were looked upon by the *Romans*, *Celts*, *Gauls*, *Greeks*, and other warlike Nations; some of which were so far from seeking to surprise their Enemies, that they apprised them of the Time and Place where they designed to attack them (a): Insomuch that *Alexander the Great* would say, that he had rather complain of his ill Fortune, than to have Cause to blush at his good one, by choosing to fall on the Enemy in the Night (b). But, notwithstanding all the specious Pretextes in favour of those antient Nations, it will be no easy Matter to prove, that such Artifices are
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(a) *Vid. int. al. Grot. de Jur. Bel. & Pac. l. iii. c. 1. § 20. Serrar. in Josb. viii. Calmet. ibid.*

(b) *2. Curt. lib. iv.*

so dishonourable, or below the Character of the greatest Monarch or General : On the contrary, it cannot be thought inglorious in them to use all proper means to save the Lives of as many of their Subjects as they can, seeing a Victory, that is not gained with this Advantage, may prove too dearly bought, and be, perhaps, as dishonourable and disadvantageous as a Defeat. *Joshua*, in the Case before us, was to engage, with his small flying Army of Foot, an Host of Confederates, as numerous as the Sand on the Sea-shore, together with a numerous Cavalry, and armed Chariots (c) ; and all of them fully determined to blot out, if possible, the very Name of *Israelite* from under Heaven. What could therefore more become his Valour, and long-tried Experience, or turn more to his Glory, than contriving the most effectual means to destroy as many as he could of the one, and to save all he could of the other ? Or where would his Advantage have been, if the Loss of each of his Men had been attended with that of twenty of the Enemy, at so great a Distance from his main Camp ? As to what

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(c) *Josh.* xi. 4, & seq.

we are told of the antient *Romans*, and other Nations, scorning to fight upon such unequal Terms, or to gain a Victory by Artifice, Stratagem, or Surprize, or any other means, but by dint of Strength and Courage ; it is well, if all this was not rather said by way of wiping off the Scandal of some signal Defeats they had met with, from some more vigilant and expert Commander, than they chanced to have at those times. For we are not without frequent Instances of their Generals having suffered themselves to be overthrown by such kind of Surprizes and Stratagems ; which might put them under a Necessity of using them afterwards, if it be really true, that they did not at first. For nothing is more notorious, than that in After-times they not only put in Practice all Kinds of Stratagems, but even of Treachery, against those brave antient Nations, both in and out of *Italy*, which they, by degrees, brought under their Yoke (*d*). As to what we are told of *Alexander's* refusing to steal a Victory, whilst he had none but effeminate *Persians*, *Indians*, &c. to fight with, and against whom he was sure to succeed,

(*d*) Vid. *Polyb. Hist. l. iv. Frontin. Stratagem. pass. Un. Hist. fol. vol. i. & ii. pass. 8vo. vol. xi. xii. &c.*

ceed, without Artifice or Stratagem, we need not wonder so much, that his unbounded Ambition, of being thought the invincible Son of *Jupiter*, did not permit him to descend to such low and derogatory Arts; but how he would have acted against more warlike Nations, may be easily guessed at, seeing all his Actions, that one Case excepted, were but one continued Series of the most deeply concerted Arts and Stratagems against the Liberties and Properties of so many Nations, over which he had neither Title nor Claim; and that frequently at the Expence of his own faithful *Macedonian* Troops, whose Lives he was justly blamed for being as lavish of, as our *Hebrew* Heroes were careful to preserve those of their own. In a Word, therefore, I can see nothing in these martial Artifices, but what is highly agreeable to the Character of the noblest Generals, or to the justest Notions we can conceive of the Divine Providence; whilst they were principally concerted for the Preservation of so many Lives, appointed, several Centuries before, to be the happy Possessors of this fertile Land, and must have been lost by a more equal Warfare; and, at the same time, gave
Thousands

Thousands of the dismayed *Canaanites*, when recovered from their Panic, an Opportunity of consulting their mutual Safety by a timely Retreat, unless resolutely bent upon their own Destruction. On the other hand, the *Hebrew* Worthies were hereby allowed such Share of the Honour, as was requisite to give their Authority a due Weight; whilst that of their Divine Protector was sufficiently secured, by the wonderful Success which he gave to their Councils, and to their Arms, against all those who continued still determined, at all Events, to fight in Defence of their old detestable Idolatry, and to oppose the *Israelites* settling in their Country. For it is plain from the Text, that none but such as those perished by *Joshua's* Sword, either in Southern or Northern *Canaan*. For as soon as he had finished this Expedition, by the Slaughter of as many as he found still in Arms, in his Return to his standing Camp, he did not fight one Battle more, but set himself immediately about the dividing of the Land, by Lot, among the Tribes (e); rearing the Tabernacle (f); appointing Cities

(e) *Josh. c. xii. — xvii.*

(f) *Ibid. xviii. 1, & seq.*

ties of Refuge (g); assigning those of the Priests and Levites (h); and executing other Parts of his Office, according to the Orders given to him by Moses (i). Agreeably to which, the Book of Judges, which begins with an Account of his Death, and of what followed it, plainly tells us, that there was no one Tribe, on this Side *Jordan*, in which there were not still remaining vast Numbers of those *Canaanites* intermixed with them; and some of them still powerful enough to keep up a Superiority over them (k). And who could they be, but those who had fled from *Joshua's* Sword, during the time of this Conquest; and afterwards taken the Opportunity of settling themselves again in their respective Territories, whilst he and his People were employed in the Division of the Land, and settling all Matters relating to their Church and State? We are told accordingly, that after the Tribes were gone, each to their own Lot, they tried in vain to dislodge those old Inhabitants (l): And no Wonder they

(g) *Josh.* xx. xxi.

(h) *Ibid.* & seq.

(i) *Ibid.* ad fin. lib.

(k) *Judg.* i. pass.

(l) *Ibid.* Ver. 21. ad fin.

they could not, seeing, instead of destroying all their Altars, Temples, and other Monuments of Idolatry, as *Moses* had commanded, they, by degrees, became themselves ensnared by them; upon which account God let them know, *that he would no longer assist them, in the driving them out; but that they should continue amongst them, to be Thorns in their Sides (m)*; as they proved accordingly. So that, upon the Whole, the Sin of the *Israelites* was not so much the sparing of their Lives, as suffering them to continue in all their old Idolatries, instead of obliging them to become Profelytes of the true God (n).

(m) *Judg. ii. 1, & seq.*

(n) *See before, p. 140, & seq.*



ESSAY



ESSAY IV.

LETTER V.

*On the War of the eleven Tribes
against that of Benjamin, and the
almost utter Excision of that impi-
ous Tribe. Judg. xix, & seq.*

Dear Sir,

I Should have wonder'd very much, if your
Sceptic Neighbours had let so remarkable
a Transaction pass unquestioned, considering
the many Difficulties it labours under ; and
expected no other, than that they would
raise a whole Battery of Objections against
it ;

it; when I was obliged, in the last Piece I sent you, to quote some Particulars of it, in order to shew how strictly the *Hebrews* kept up their martial Discipline (a). It is, indeed, surprising to find in *Israel*, so soon after *Joshua's* Decease (A), not only a second Sodom,

(a) See before, p. 227, & seq.

(A) Authors are not agreed about the Time in which this unnatural Action happened; but most of them place it soon after the Death of *Joshua*; that is, according to Archbishop *Usser*, between the Year of the World 2591. and 2599. which was the Year in which *Othniel* was chosen Judge over the *Israelites* (1). During which Anarchy that other Transaction is supposed to have happened, of the *Danites* seizing on the City of *Laiſh*, and carrying thither the *Ephod* and *Teraphim* of *Micah*, together with

his young hired *Levite*, and setting them up in this their new Settlement (2); where they continued till the Captivity of the Land, as the Original hath it, or, more reasonably, till the Captivity of the Ark (3); supposing the Word *למנו* to be a Mistake of the Transcriber, instead of *למלך*; it being absurd to think, that such a flagrant Piece of Idolatry should have been suffered, either during the Administration of *Samuel*, or the Reign of *David*, and other pious Kings of *Judah* (4).

(1) Vid. *Usser. in An.*

(2) *Jud. xviii. pass.*

(3) 1 *Sam. iv. 11, & seq.*

(4) See *Un. Hist. 8vo. vol. iii. p. 239. (Q). iv. 7, & seq.*

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Sodom, but one more degenerate and wicked than that which God had destroyed by Fire from Heaven (b) ; inasmuch as the brutal Indignity was offered, not to a Stranger, but to an *Israelite*, and one of the *Levitic Tribe* (c). It is no less strange, that a Man of his sacred Function, having found his Concubine (B) false to his Bed, should, after a four Months

(b) *Genesis* xix. *pass.*

(c) *Judg.* xix. 1, & *seq.* 22, & *seq.*

(B) A Concubine, in the *Hebrew* Sense, was not a bare kept Mistress, but a Wife of the second Order, and differed only from one of the first in the Omission of some Ceremony attending the Marriage of the latter, and a Contract, by which the Husband obliged himself to endow her, and make the Children he had by her to be his Heirs: Whereas the Concubine was taken without such a Dowry, but was intitled to Food, Raiment, and the Privilege of his Bed, equally with the

Wife ; and her Children claimed a Portion of his Goods, according to his Circumstances. These two Ranks were not only allowed by the *Mosaic Law*, but a Man might take as many of either as he could maintain (1). Both Ranks were obliged to be faithful to him ; but, in case of Infidelity, whether the Concubine was liable to the same capital Punishment that the Wives were, is not agreed : But, if found guilty, after full Proof, he was obliged to divorce her for ever from him, if not

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(1) *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 140. (F).

Months Divorce, go so far to seek her, venture to be reconciled to, and take her home again, contrary to the Law of *Moses*. The butcherly Method he took to apprise the Tribes of her Abuse and Death (*d*), is unprecedented; and in the Account he gives of the unnatural Attempt made on him by the Inhabitants of *Gibeah*, he artfully conceals his thrusting her out to them, to save himself from their more brutish Lust. But what is the most surprising of all is, that the whole Tribe of *Benjamin*, instead of delivering up those Miscreants to a condign Punishment, or rather, instead of offering themselves to the other Tribes, to become their Executioners, as that vile Action reflected the greatest Reproach upon themselves, should so unanimously resolve, at all Events, to take up Arms, in Defence of that base and unworthy City, against the united Forces of the other eleven Tribes (*e*). But here it ought to be remembered, that the inspired

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(*d*) *Judg.* xix. 29, & seq.

(*e*) *Ibid.* xx. 12, & seq.

to prosecute her; so that it was altogether irregular in the *Levite* to go in

search of, or to be reconciled to her, after such a Breach of Fidelity.

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Writer of this strange Transaction begins and ends his Relation of it with these remarkable Words; that *in those Days there was no King in Israel; but that every Man did that which was right in his own Eyes (f)*. To which give me Leave to add, that in this the *Benjamites* did but too plainly verify the Prophecy of their dying Father *Jacob*, concerning that fierce and untractable Tribe (g); *Benjamin shall ravin as a Wolf, or, is like a ravenous Wolf, which falls foul on his Prey in the Morning, and in the Evening divideth the Spoil*. Nor is this the only Instance wherein they verified this Character: Witness, among others, their bloody Wars against the House of *David*, in favour of that of *Saul*, who was of that Tribe (h). But in this, and the like Cases, it were unreasonable to draw any Inference from the tumultuous and irregular Actions of a Tribe or People, to the lessening of the Authority of the Writer of any History, who ought rather to be admired for the Impartiality with

(f) *Judge* xix. 1. xxi. 25.

(g) *Genesis* xlix. 27.

(h) *Vid. int. al. 2 Sam.* ii. 8. 12, & *seq.* & *alibi* pass.

which he relates a Fact so little to the Credit of his Nation.

The main Difficulty therefore which you are concerned to remove, with respect to the bloody War of the eleven Tribes against that of *Benjamin*, is neither the unnatural Behaviour of the *Gibeathites* to the *Levite*, and his Concubine; nor that of that whole Tribe, in refusing to surrender those brutish Wretches to condign Punishment: For how strange soever either of them may appear, yet is there nothing in it either improbable, or inconsistent with the Degeneracy of those times, and the Character of that haughty and untractable Tribe. Neither will there any thing appear extraordinary in that laudable Zeal, which the other Tribes so unanimously expressed on this Occasion; nor in the Resolution they took of punishing those Miscreants with the utmost Severity; when we call to mind how expressly this had been commanded them by God, to the utter Extermination of those that should be found guilty of such vile Abominations (i). And it was

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(i) *Vid.* Deut. xiii. 12, & seq. xxiii. 17. *Levit.* xviii. 22. xx. 13. & alib. pass.

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on account of that, among many other crying Sins, that the *Canaanites* were doomed to utter Destruction; which Punishment was no less severely denounced against the *Israelites*, that should be found guilty of them. It would have, indeed, been more surprising, if, in a Case of this Nature, they had expressed less Warmth and Abhorrence than they did, not only against the brutish Perpetrators of that unnatural Deed, but much more against the more wicked *Benjamites*, for patronizing it, instead of shewing themselves the most forward in punishing it.

The chief Difficulty therefore remaining, that is really such, and that no small one in your Opponent's Eye, lieth in accounting for the ill Success that attended the laudable Resolution of the eleven Tribes, and for their being so shamefully repulsed, and with so considerable a Loss; especially after having consulted the Divine Oracle about this War, and received such an encouraging Answer from it, as could hardly be interpreted to import less than a Promise of a complete Victory, as a due Reward for their Zeal: Whilst, to their great Mortification and Astonishment, they

see the Arms of that impious and untractable Tribe crowned with an undeserved Victory. These are the strong Terms in which your Opponent couches his Objection: In which, however, he seems to overlook two material Points, amiss, in their Behaviour, on this important and extraordinary Occasion; namely, 1st, However laudable and conformable to the *Mosaic* Law their Intention might be, to punish the impious *Gibeathites* with the utmost Severity; yet this sudden and unanimous Resolution, of declaring an offensive War against the whole Tribe of *Benjamin*, appears plainly enough, by all Circumstances, to have been the Effect of their Resentment against it, for daring to oppose themselves, in Defence of such Miscreants, against the whole *Israelitish* Congregation, rather than the Result of a cool, sincere, and deliberate Debate, about the most effectual Means to extirpate such shameful Impieties out of their Commonwealth. Had they given themselves time to think coolly upon it, they must have remembered, that if it was not permitted to them to declare War, even against Strangers, without consulting the Divine Oracle, that is, the High-Priest, by
Urim;

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Urim; much less was it for them, not only to resolve, but to bind themselves by a solemn Oath, to engage in one against one of their own Tribes; and to pursue it with such furious Zeal. For it is plain, however your Antagonist may have overlooked it, that they never once thought of consulting the Divine Will, or, as the inspired Writers commonly word it, of *inquiring of*, or *asking Counsel of*, the LORD, till the War was unanimously resolved upon, and sworn to. And then it was not to inquire about the Fitness or Lawfulness of it, for that they took for granted; but only which Tribe should have the Post of Honour, and the chief Command, in this hostile Expedition; that no Jarring or Dispute about it might obstruct the Execution or Success of it. The other Circumstance which your Opponent hath overlooked, is, that the Divine Oracle, or, as is commonly understood, the Answer of the High-Priest by *Urim*, only informs them, that the Preference inquired after is due to the Tribe of *Judah*. But this Answer was not attended with any Promise of Success (k),

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which

(k) *Judg.* xx. 18, & seq.

which was rather expected by them as a thing of course, or as the natural Consequence of so pious and laudable an Enterprize. The Cause, they so far rightly judged, was God's; how could they suppose that it would end in their Defeat? They were superior by far in Number to the rebellious Tribe; how should they then expect any thing but Victory? In this Persuasion and Confidence, they never inquire whether God will bless them with one, but only ask who shall lead them to it: And this it was that proved the Cause of their first Defeat; and that justly too, as a condign Punishment for their Presumption, in rashly decreeing the Excision of a Tribe, without either consulting God's Will about it, or trying some previous Method of reducing them to Reason, by more pacific means: For this was, in Fact, making themselves Judges and Executioners in God's Cause, without his Authority, Advice, or Consent. To this I may add, what the *Jews* farther allege against them, that they fought his Cause with unhallowed, or with Hands as guilty as those of that rebellious Tribe; in suffering a new Kind of Idolatry to be set and kept up amongst them; if they were

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not,

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not, for the most part, infected with it (1); and which it was their Duty to have extirpated, before they presumed to draw their Swords in God's Cause, upon any other Occasion. This is, indeed, the more probable, because not only the *Jewish*, but most other Chronologers, place the setting up of *Micah's* Idol, in their new *Dan*, much about the same time that this War happened; both Transactions being distinguished by the sacred Historian (m), that they happened when *there was no King in Israel, but every one did what was right in his own Eyes.* In this State therefore of Anarchy and Apostasy, how little Reason had they to expect a Blessing on a Zeal so partial and blind; which, in all Likelihood, would have been as cold and unactive against *Benjamin*, as against *Dan*, had it not been blown up into a Fury against the former, partly by the then unheard of Circumstance of a Concubine hewn and dispatched in Pieces to the Tribes, and partly by the more surprising Resolution of the *Benjamites*, to stand in the Defence of the brutish *Gibeathites*! And in this Case,

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(1) *Vid. Judg. xviii. 30, & seq.*

(m) *Ibid. xvii. 6. xviii. 1. xix. 1. xxi. 25.*

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how could they be more effectually brought to a juster Way of Thinking, than by their being suffered to meet with a signal Defeat, where they expected nothing less than a complete Victory? Accordingly, we find, that the first Discomfiture brings them to their Tears and Prayers; they now begin to consult God, not about a General, but about the Lawfulness of the War; and, upon their finding it approved by him (n), renew the Onset with fresh Vigour, tho' with no better Success.

It will not be amiss here to observe, that the Phrase here used, upon both these Consultations, of asking Counsel of the Lord, doth often mean no more, than consulting their grand Council, or *Sanhedrin*, with the High-Priest at their Head; and these were the proper Judges of all such things; and whose Sentence was of equal Force, though not so infallibly sure, as if it had been delivered by the Divine Oracle (o). So that it was no less than a capital Crime to refuse to abide by their Determination. And this is all

(n) *Judg. xx. 23, & seq.*

(o) *Deut. xvi. 18, & seq. xvii. 11, & seq.*

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all the Inquiry and Application which the *Israelites* seem to have made upon this Occasion; *viz.* They first inquired of this grand Council, then solemnly assembled, who should have the Command of the Army; and, upon their being unexpectedly defeated, they consulted them about the Lawfulness of the War, which they now began to fear was displeasing to God; since they had succeeded no better on their first Onset. For as to their consulting the Lord, in the usual solemn Form, that is, by the *Urim*, and before the Ark, and the High-Priest, it doth not appear, from the Tenor of the Text, that they thought of it till after their second Defeat: For then it is plainly said, that *all the Children of Israel, even all the People, went up unto the House of God; where they not only fasted and wept until the Evening, but pre-
faced their Address to him, with the usual Sacrifice of Burnt and Peace Offerings; upon which Phinehas, the then High-Priest, stand-
ing before the Ark, asked Counsel, with the usual Solemnity, in their Name; saying, Shall I go once more to Battle against the Children of Benjamin my Brother, or shall I cease?* And received this favourable Answer from
God;

God; *Go up, for To-morrow I will deliver them into thy Hand* (p); as he accordingly did, to the almost total Extirpation of that rebellious Tribe (q). Upon the Whole, therefore, the two first Battles, in which *Israel* lost 40,000 Men, may be justly looked upon as their rash and inconsiderate Act and Deed; in which, whatever Countenance may be supposed to have been given to that Enterprize, whether by God, or by the *Sanhedrin*, yet it was still without any Promise of Success; and I may add, without any just Grounds to hope for it, from anything that might be inferred from the two first Answers, and much less from their irregular Way of Proceeding, in a Matter of that great and universal Concern. But now that God is not only applied to in a proper Way, and prevailed upon by the Prayers and Tears, the Sacrifices, and other Acts of Humiliation, of the whole People, to give them a more encouraging Promise, they renew their Hostilities with more Caution and Regularity: *Benjamin* is soon made to pay dearly, not only for the Lives of the 40,000 they had slain, on the two former Rencounters,

(p) *Judg. xx. 26, & seq.*

(q) *Ibid. ad fin.*

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ters, but likewise for their daring to take up Arms in Defence of the impious *Gibeathites*; whilst the Fire consumes the Cities, and the Sword the Lives, of those rebellious Miscreants: Infomuch that the whole Tribe is now reduced to about 600 fugitive Desperadoes, who went and fortified themselves upon a barren Rock (*r*); and must, in all Probability, have perished there, to the utter Excision of that whole Tribe, had not God inspired the rest with returning Sentiments of Pity towards that small and unfortunate Remnant, and with a Remorse for having so nearly exterminated one of the Tribes of *Israel* (*s*).

But there was still another, and more dangerous, Effect to be feared, from their too rash and precipitate Zeal against the *Benjamites*, at first; viz. the general and solemn Curse they had pronounced against any one that should give his Daughter in Marriage to any of that rebellious Tribe, whilst they had suffered their furious Zeal to transport them so far, as to destroy all their Females; so that the sparing of these 600 Men could be

(*r*) *Judg.* xx. 47, & seq.

(*s*) *Ibid.* xxi. 2, & seq.

of little Service towards the saving of that Tribe from perishing, unless they could also find them Wives, on whom to beget a new Offspring. In this Perplexity they return all to *Bethel*, filling the Air with their Cries, about the Feet of the Ark ; but come not so much to inquire of God, whether the Oath they had thus rashly sworn was lawful or no; and if the latter, whether he would not in Mercy forgive and dispense them from it, as to expostulate, in a kind of tumultuous manner, with him, for suffering them to bind themselves by it, to the endangering the Loss of one of their Tribes. *Lord God of Israel*, say they, *why is this come to pass, that there should be To-day a Tribe lacking in Israel?* They proceed next to offer new Sacrifices and Burnt-offerings, and to implore his Pity towards the poor Remains of that once flourishing Tribe: But as the Text takes no Notice of their consulting him in the usual Form, nor of their receiving any Direction from the High-Priest, we may reasonably suppose, either that they omitted that Circumstance, or that God refused to give them any Direction, how they should act upon that

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that Emergency. For we meet with some such Instances in Scripture, in which God has thought fit to suspend his Answer, when thus asked, in the usual Form; and upon perhaps a less provoking Occasion than this, as he did, some time after, to *Saul*, upon his Son *Jonathan's* having incurred his Curse, by tasting of the forbidden Honey (*u*): And this, not so much, in all Probability, to shew his Displeasure for a Transgression unwittingly committed, as to inspire the People with a deeper Sense of his all-seeing Eye, who would not suffer even so small and inconsiderable a Fault to pass by uncensured. Something parallel to this, tho' more aggravated, we may reckon the concealed Theft of *Achan*; for which, not only the guilty Person, but the rest of the People, were punished with an unexpected Defeat before *Ai* (*w*); tho' altogether ignorant of it, till it was discovered to them by the *Urim*; whereas, in the Case before us, the *Israelites* could not but be sensible, both of the Rashness and Unlawfulness of the Oath which they had taken against *Benjamin*; and, now the Fury of their Zeal against them

(*u*) *Vid. int. al. 1 Sam. xiv. 37.*

(*w*) *Josh. vii. pass.*

them was abated by the great Slaughter they had made of them, had still less Reason to ask or expect an Answer from the Divine Oracle, in so plain a Case. They had infringed on God's Prerogative, in dooming a whole Tribe to utter Excision; and bound themselves under an heavy Curse, to become the Executioners of his Vengeance, without consulting his Will and Pleasure: What remained for them now to do, but to bewail their own Presumption, and beg of him to release them from their Oath, and permit them to raise up again that Tribe, which they had so inconsiderately doomed to Destruction?

Had they taken this laudable Method, I doubt not but God would have either absolved them from their Oath, or directed them to some means how to supply the remaining 600 *Benjamites* with Wives, without the Breach of it; whether by dispensing with the Obligation of marrying *Israelitish* Women; or permitting them to seize on them by Force, and without their Parents Consent; or, lastly, by naturalizing such a Number of their Virgin Slaves, as would have sufficed for

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for their Purpose; any of which the High-Priest in being could have authorized, in such an Emergency, without any Infringement of the *Mosaic Law*; as he was supreme Judge in all such doubtful Cases, especially when invested with the *Urim* and *Thummim* (u).

But here the Tribes proceeded in a different, that is, in their old, irregular Way; and, taking their Oath against *Benjamin* to be absolutely binding and indispensable, only sought how to elude it, without incurring the Curse they had tacked to it. And tho' they bewailed the Quantity of Blood it had made them shed, yet can they not think of any better Expedient for evading it, than by shedding of more: They blame themselves for the great Slaughter they had made of that stubborn Tribe; and yet resolve to destroy those that did not assist them in it: And the Inhabitants of *Jabesh-Gilead*, being found, by the Muster-Rolls, to have absented themselves from this bloody War, must be all destroyed,
Men,

(u) See *Un. Hist.* 8vo. vol. iii. p. 76, & seq. & *ibid.* citat. *Joseph. cont. Apion.* Buxtorf. *Synag. & Commentar. in Deut. xix. xxi. xxiii.* Calmet. *procem. in Num. & al.*

Men, Women, and Children, in order to save all the Virgins they found amongst them, and bestow them upon the remaining 600 *Benjamites*. But the Number of them proving insufficient, they have recourse to another Stratagem, equally elusory and scandalous; *viz.* permitting the other 200, that were still unprovided for, to fall foul on a Company of Damsels, coming down from *Shiloh*, the then Place of *Israelitish* Worship, and forcing them into Matrimony, without either their own, or their Parents, Consent. This Proceeding your Opponent justly blames, as who doth not? but is unwilling to allow it, what it really appears to be, the Result of a rash and precipitate Judgment, whether of the *Sanhedrin*, or only of the Heads of the Tribes, it matters not, so long as it doth not appear from the Text, that the Pontiff was consulted about it, in the usual Form; or that it was in the least approved, much less dictated, by the Divine Oracle, as your Opponent would willingly insinuate. The very Words with which the inspired Historian concludes the Relation; *viz.* that *in those Days there was no King in Israel, but every one did what was right in his own Eyes*; sufficiently

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ficiently prove the contrary ; and that their whole Proceeding stands condemned by him, as displeasing to the Divine Being. For it plainly intimates, that this Epoch, short as it proved, was a time of Anarchy and Confusion ; wherein the People, for want of proper Governors to restrain them, had run themselves into all kind of Licentiousness. The idolatrous Worship set up by the *Danites*, in their new Settlement ; the abominable Attempt made by the *Gibeathites*, on the travelling *Levite* ; the unnatural Abuse of his Concubine ; and the tumultuous War, with all its dire Effects that ensued ; are brought in as pregnant Instances of the then reigning Corruption ; and, being so little to the Credit of the *Israelitish* Nation, are no less manifest Proofs of the Sincerity and Impartiality of the inspired Historian. It is therefore in vain that your Antagonist pretends to offer some more rational Expedients, by which the spilling of so much Blood might have been prevented, instead of those violent ones, into which the *Israelites* suffered themselves to be hurried. Any Man of common Sense might do the same ; and yet so unhappy is he in his Choice of them, that

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the most considerable one of all he proposes; viz. that for the saving the *Gileadites* from Destruction; can by no means be allowed of, as being altogether inconsistent with the Laws and martial Discipline of the *Israelites*. He tells you very gravely, that these, instead of dooming the Inhabitants of *Gilead* to utter Excision, ought only to have obliged them to give all their unmarried Females in Marriage to the 600 *Benjamites*; which they might the more lawfully have done, because, as they did not appear in Arms at the Place of Rendezvous, they could not be affected by the general Oath which the rest of the Tribes had sworn. But here he should have considered, that by their not answering the general Summons, they had, according to the martial Laws of *Israel*, forfeited their Lives, and incurred the Penalty of military Execution, from which no Power could then exempt them; there being, at this Juncture, neither King nor Judge among them. And if he says, that the grand Council, or *Sanhedrin*, could have dispensed with the Severity of that Law; which, by-the-by, he will find an hard Matter to prove; yet it ought to be considered, how impolitic such a Step must have

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have been, and what an Encouragement it might have given to the rest, to neglect the excellent Discipline which *Moses* and *Joshua* had left amongst them, and on which, considering, as I shall shew in my next, how they were surrounded every-where with Enemies, besides those which they were forced still to entertain within their own Bowels, was the greatest Security they could have against any Attempt, either from within, or from without (x), and a sufficient Reason for their observing it with such Exactness and Severity.

I have, by this time, gone thro' every thing worth Notice in your Opponent's Letter, except the small Sting which he leaves at the Close of it; but which neither carries Sharpness or Poison enough to fright one from handling it. He thinks it very surprising, on the one hand, that *Phinehas*, who, as High-Pontiff, sat at the Helm of, and steered, the whole *Sanbedrin*, should yet be so far wanting, either in Zeal, Courage, or Conduct, as not to make use of all his Interest and Authority with them, to suppress

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(x) See before, p. 227.

all those shameful Disorders that then reigned in *Israel*; and on the other, that if such was his Remissness, or Want of Authority, upon such an Occasion, one would reasonably expect, that God should, as he has often done before and since, have interposed his Divine Power, either to inflame his Zeal, or give a due Weight to his Authority, both over the grand Council, and over the rest of the People.

With respect to the first, I shall only observe, that *Phinehas* wanted neither Zeal nor Courage in God's Cause: Had his Authority been equal to either, there could never such a general Apostasy and Corruption have crept into the *Jewish Church and Commonwealth*. A Person who had even dared to stop a general Defection of the whole Nation by the Death of the two chief Offenders, and those of the highest Rank (y), cannot be justly supposed to have connived at this general Apostasy, for want of Zeal or Courage, had he been supported, as he ought, by the secular Power. But the whole Tenor of the

Book

(y) See *Num.* xxv. 6.

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Book of *Judges*, and the frequent Apostasies that crept in again and again, after the Death of any of those Chiefs, whom God set up for Rulers and Deliverers of that rebellious Nation, is but too plain an Evidence of the little Influence which the *Jewish* Pontiffs, and the *Sanhedrin*, had over them, whenever there happened an Interregnum, or the Want of a strenuous Judge, to give it a due Sanction.

But here, says your Opponent, the more visible Need was there of the Divine Interposition, to give that Sanction to their disregarded Authority, in order to check that general Depravity. Before I answer this last Objection, give me Leave to observe to you, and I would advise you to do the same to him, how widely and inconsistently Men in this Way of Thinking are apt to argue, as best serves their Turn. At one time, you shall hear them exclaim against the Probability of God's interposing so wonderfully, and so frequently, in favour of such a poor inconsiderable Nation; which, most commonly, were apt to repay his signal Favours with black Ingratitude, Murmurs, and downright

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Apostasy:

Apostasy: At other times, as in the Case before us, they will not scruple to ascribe all those Disorders and Corruptions to the Want of this extraordinary Interposition. Sometimes these Divine Interpositions are arraigned, either as beneath the Dignity of the Supreme Being, or as an Infringement on the Liberty of rational Agents: And at other times, the Want of them is urged as an Argument against his Providence. So that, unless he will please to rain or shine, to act or not act, as they think proper, they will, at all Hazards, take the Liberty of censuring, or calling in question, what the sacred Books relate of him. How vastly short was the great Mr. Locke of these fine Reasoners, in Sagacity and Modesty, who could freely own, that *he had spent the latter Part of his Life in the Study of them, and could never be weary of admiring the great Views of those Divine Oracles, and the just Relation of each Part; in which every Discovery he made, was a new Subject of the deepest Admiration* (a)! But to return to the Objection of God's not interposing to suppress the then reigning Degeneracy: It

(a) See *Coste in Vit. Locks* p. 84

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is not only without Foundation, but expressly contrary to what the sacred Writer affirms, who tells us (b), that he sent them an Angel or Messenger (C); to reprove them, in his Name, in such strong Terms, that he brought the whole Congregation to their Tears; from which the Place was called *Bokim*, or the Place of Weeping. But as this penitent Fit proved but short-lived (c), and they so quickly relapsed into their old Apostasy, he punished them with a severe Servitude under the King of *Mesopotamia*, under which they

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groaned

(b) *Judg.* ii. 11, & seq.

(c) *Ibid.* iii. 8, & seq.

(C) The Hebrew Word מלאך signifies both an Angel and a Messenger, but most commonly the former, when joined with the Word יהוה or אלהים as it is here. However, the Generality of the Jews take the Person here sent to have been *Phinehas*, the High-Priest; to whom, with respect to his pontifical Dignity, that Title might properly enough be

given; as we find it is afterwards by St. *John*, to the Bishops of the several Churches he directs his Epistle to (1). But whether he, or a real Angel, the Effect doth plainly shew a Divine Interposition; since nothing less than that could have ever wrought so quick and universal a Change, or squeezed so great a Plenty of Tears out of such stony Hearts.

(1) *Apocal.* i. 20. ii. 1, & seq.

groaned about eight Years ; and, upon their fresh Application to him for Mercy, delivered them from it, by the Hands of *Othniel*, the Son of *Caleb*, who became their first Judge, eight Years after *Joshua's* Death (*d*). So that their Slavery lasted just as long as their Defection and Anarchy. This was the Method by which God had frequently threatened, by the Mouth of *Moses* and *Joshua* (*e*), to punish their Defections ; and according to which we do not read of any one of them, but was attended by some suitable severe Slavery, under some of the Nations round about them ; and these were as infallibly followed by a signal Deliverance, as soon as their Sufferings had brought them to a Sense of their Guilt, and rendered them fit Objects of Mercy (*f*). This was God's constant Method with them, during the whole Period of their being governed by Judges ; and such an one, whatever your Antagonist Neighbours may think of it, as even an im-
partial

(*d*) See *Usher's Annals*, sub *A. M.* 2599. and the *Chronology in the Margin of our English Bible*.

(*e*) *Vid.* *Deut.* xxviii. *pass.* *Josh.* xxiii. 3. 11, & *seq.*

(*f*) *Deut.* xxx. *pass.*

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partial Reader must judge highly agreeable to his Divine Attributes, and no less wisely calculated to reduce, not only the wavering *Israelites*, but likewise their idolatrous Neighbours, from their vain Confidence in their false Deities; to let them both see and feel how displeasing the abominable Rites they used, in their Worship of them, were to him, by the extreme Severity with which he punished them, both upon his own People and them: As, on the other hand, what could be more effectual to invite those heathen Nations, too naturally allured by the Hopes of worldly Prosperity, to his more pure and reasonable Service (D), than to behold that of the *Israelites* to rise and fall, in proportion to their Obedience to his Laws, and their Aversion or Propensity to all

(D) It must be remembered here, that those Heathen Nations that became tributary to, or were permitted to live among, the *Israelites*, were not obliged to be circumcised, and to observe the *Mosaic Law*;

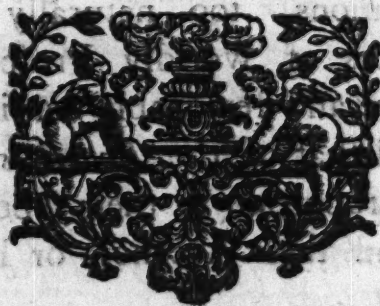
but only to abjure their false Deities, and idolatrous Worship; and to observe the Precepts of *Noah*, mentioned in a former Essay (1): So that they only became Profelytes to the original Law of Nature.

(1) See before, p. 129:

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all idolatrous Worship? But this hath been, I hope, so fully and fairly shewn, in a former Essay (g), that there is the less need of my dwelling any longer upon it.

(g) See before, pag. 142, & seq.



E S S A Y



ESSAY V.

LETTER VI.

On the quick and surprising Deliverance of the City of Jabelh, and the signal Overthrow given to the Ammonitish Army, by Saul, the first Monarch of Israel. In which that generous and noble Exploit is display'd in all its amazing Circumstances; the Cavils and Objections, raised against the Possibility and Probability, fully answered; and the Feasibility fairly proved; by proper Observations upon the excellent Constitution, and martial Discipline, of the Hebrews. Interspersed with Geographical, and other explanatory Notes, on their expeditious Manner of Raising, Completing, and Equipping, their numerous Armies;

mies ; Marching, Encamping, and Engaging. A Sermon, penned by the same Lay Hand, in order to be preached by a proper Person at the Head of a mutinous Body of English Forces, on a very interesting Occasion ; the farther Account of which is given, immediately after the Opening of the Text.

I SAM. xi. 6, & seq.

And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, when he heard those Tidings ; and his Anger was greatly kindled.

And he took a Yoke of Oxen, and hewed them in Pieces, and sent them throughout all the Coasts of Israel by the Hands of Messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his Oxen : And the Fear of the Lord fell on the People, and they came out with one Consent.

THE Occasion of this dreadful and unusual Summons of the newly chosen Hebrew Monarch, to the ten Tribes on this Side Jordan, you will find mentioned at the Beginning

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Beginning of the Chapter; where *Nabash*, King of the *Ammonites*, a most inveterate Enemy to *Israel*, is related to have reduced the Inhabitants of *Jabesh-Gilead*, on the other Side of that River, to such Streights, that they were upon the Point of buying their Lives at the Expence of a most unworthy Slavery; and to submit to the cruellest and most ignominious Conditions, of being deprived of their right Eyes, as an eternal Brand of Infamy to their whole Nation, and an effectual means of rendering them utterly useless in War, and incapable of regaining their Liberty. The Pretence for this unjust and inhuman Behaviour of the *Ammonitish* King, you may read in the tenth and following Chapter of the Book of *Judges*, where you will find the Case between the two Nations fairly stated, and the Ground of the Quarrel as fairly exploded, by the then valiant *Hebrew* Chief, *Jephthah* the *Gileadite*. But as his Reasons could not prevail upon them to recede, till he had forced them, by the complete Victory he soon after gained over them; their Defeat had so excited their Rage ever since, that they thought now no Revenge bloody enough for their Resentment. And
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this it was that made their haughty Monarch to refuse the *Jabeshites* any other, than those cruel and ignominious Terms you have heard. So that the most that their Submission and Distress could obtain from him, was a poor Truce, or rather Reprieve, of seven Days; in which Space of Time if no Relief could be procured from the other ten Tribes, they agreed to submit to their hard Fate. And it is indeed a Wonder, that he, who breathed nothing but Disgrace and Ruin against the *Israelites*, should yet yield to them this short Respite, and run the Risk of a Delay. But here the *Jewish* Historian tells us (*Antiq.* l. vi. c. 5.), that the Besieged had already sent to implore the Assistance of the two Tribes and an half on their Side of *Jordan*; and that none of them dared to stir an Hand to their Relief. So that there being so little Likelihood, that the other ten on this Side, which were still at a greater Distance, should be able to bring them any in so short a time; he might, in that Confidence, easily grant them that Breathing-time; unless we will rather suppose, as most likely, that the Divine Providence so far restrained his Resentment, in order to give the new *Jewish*

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Monarch an Opportunity of signalizing this Expedition, which was, in some measure, the first Essay of his Government, with such an eminent Proof of his Fortitude and Conduct; and to reward his Generosity with such suitable Success, as should inspire his new Subjects with a greater Regard to, and Confidence in, him.

Accordingly the sacred Historian tells us, that *Saul*, upon his Return from the Field, and receiving the first News of the *Jabeshites* extreme Distress, was inspired with a more than human Courage; whilst the rest of the People could only express their Concern, by their doleful Outcries: And that having, in a kind of enthusiastic Fury, hewed a Yoke of Oxen into small Pieces, he dispatched them with all Speed, by proper Messengers, to all the Tribes, with the dreadful Threat mentioned in the Text, *Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his Oxen, &c.* The Consequence of which was, that the ten Tribes immediately gathered themselves with one Consent, or, as the Original elegantly expresses it, *as one Man*; and obeyed his Summons, with such

such surprizing Readiness and Speed, as to be able to join him, at the Time and Place appointed by him for the general Rendezvous, tho' some of the Tribes were seated at above an hundred Miles Distance from it, as will be shewn to you in due time.

As I am called upon, by my Duty and Office, to speak to you from this Place, on this blessed Sabbath-day, you will have the less Cause to wonder at my choosing to entertain you, on this Occasion, with this noble and truly generous Expedition, of the new *Hebrew* Monarch; and to remind you of the singular Blessing that attended it; if you will but seriously reflect, that you are now called upon, and commanded, by your King and Country, to an Enterprize no less glorious and pressing, the rescuing of a Mother City of this Realm from falling into the Hands of a no less inveterate Enemy; and some Thousands of your brave Fellow-Subjects from the fatal and unavoidable Necessity of sacrificing their Lives, to avoid being reduced to the lowest State of Slavery: And whose Distress, and imminent Danger, though not perhaps quite so urgent as that of
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the *Jabeshites* in the Text, yet calls as loudly for all your wonted Valour, and quickest Dispatch, for their Relief. The next thing I would have you consider is, how little Hopes the late Murmuring and Discontent (not to call it by a worse Name, which you have expressed during a two or three Days long and difficult March, made perhaps somewhat more tiresome by the Badness of the Weather), afford us of your meeting with the same Success as those brave *Hebrews* did, unless you be brought to a better Sense of your Duty, before you come to engage our common Enemy. And let me add, thirdly and lastly, that should this prove the happy Case, and God should so far prosper what I am now going to deliver to you, as to inspire and bless you with an equal Courage and Readiness, which those generous *Hebrews* displayed on the like Occasion, I must not forbear reminding you, that you will, even then, have the less Reason to become arrogant and assuming upon it; a thing but too common in the like Cases, seeing, should your returning Loyalty and Valour achieve what their steady and unshaken one formerly did, the effectual Deliverance of the City, and the total Over-

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throw of the Enemy, yet your Laurels would come still vastly short of theirs, and be no less tarnished by the mutinous Reluctance you have hitherto shewn on this Occasion, than theirs must have been imbrightened by the surprising Chearfulness and Dispatch, which they displayed in that; since it plainly appears, that this Exploit, great and arduous as it was, did not, from first to last, that is, from their receiving *Saul's* first Summons to the War, to their putting an effectual End to it by the total Overthrow of the *Ammonites*, take them up above five, or, at the most, six Days.

But here it may be perhaps objected, that this last and mortifying Caution I have been giving you, might have more properly been deferred, till your singular Valour and Success against the Enemy had called for it, than insisted upon at this time, when you have still a two Days long and difficult March to come at them, and the greatest Part of you seem to have so little Stomach to either. It will perhaps be thought, that, instead of damping your Zeal and Valour, by this mortifying Caution, I ought rather to try to rouse it

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it up, by such enlivening Examples, as are to be met with in the History of the *Greek*, *Roman*, and other antient Nations. And I might, indeed, here entertain you with a long Detail of *Hannibal's* arduous and hazardous March through *Spain* and *Gaul*, over the *Alps* and *Pyrenees*, and forcing his Way thro' Mountains of Ice, and impenetrable Rocks, to come and attack the Enemies of his dear Country, in the very Heart of theirs. I might remind you likewise of those surprising and almost incredible Journeys, shall I call them, or not rather Flights? which *Cæsar* is recorded to have taken from *Rome*, either to the *Rhofne* or the *Rbine*, to quash some dangerous Revolt in the Birth; and in which he himself tells us, that he had already reached the Enemy, before the News of his Departure was known in that Capital. I might also, and with no less Pleasure, expatiate on that glorious and unparalleled Retreat, which the celebrated *Xenophon* made at the Head of his 10,000 *Greeks*, by a March of above 23,000 Miles, through strange and impassable Countries, harassed and pursued all the Way, as they were, by their implacable Enemies, from *Babylon* quite to the *Euxine Sea*. These

and many other the like Instances of Valour and Indefatigableness, could I produce out of profane History ; sufficient, one would think, the least of them, to rouse the most dastardly and desponding amongst you to Courage and Activity, on such a critical Juncture as this. But what Impression can I expect such an elaborate Display of Oratory would make on such a discontented Audience as I am speaking to, but that of an obstinate Unbelief ? Would not most of you be ready to think, or even to say, that *Cæsar*, *Xenophon*, and other panegyrical Retailers of their own heroic Deeds, do too plainly appear to have had a greater Regard to their own Glory than to Truth, to deserve to be credited in every thing they have said ? Would not you likewise be apt to allege, in Excuse for your Want of Zeal or Courage, that the unbounded Ambition, Thirst after Glory, Revenge, and other the like Motives, which hurried an *Hannibal*, or a *Cæsar*, on such arduous and desperate Attempts, are of too base a Nature, to be proposed for Imitation to a Christian Army, especially on such a Juncture as this, and after your late mutinous Behaviour hath so plainly

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convinced me, how hardly you are like to be wrought upon by those of a more noble Nature, the Love and Defence of your Country, and the Preservation of your Religion and Liberties?

Well then, so far I hope I shall be acquitted, for not attempting to reduce you to your Duty from such precarious and exceptionable Examples; and for confining myself to such only, as are to be found in the sacred Books, and of whose Authority you can have no Pretence for any such Doubts or Objections: For this Reason I have particularly singled out this Instance, of *Saul's* quick and effectual Relief of the distressed *Jabeshites*, not only as it bears a visible Analogy to the noble Enterprize, to which you are commanded by your King and Country, and against which you have shewed such an ungenerous and disloyal Reluctancy, but likewise in hopes that the great and almost insurmountable Difficulties, which the new *Jewish* Monarch, and his Army, were forced to overcome, in order to effect it in the short Space that was allotted to them, and the Blessing that attended their zealous Endeavours,

vours, and surprising Dispatch, will at once quell all your Murmurings and Discontents; and, by God's Assistance, inspire you again with the like generous Ardour for your distressed Fellow-Subjects, and such as may intitle you, in some measure, to the same Glory and Success with them: For if you duly compare with me the Nature of the Exploit I am going to set before your Eyes, the Difficulties that accompanied it, and the short Space that *Saul* had to perform it, with the wonderful Success that attended it; if you consider that he had but five, or, at most, six Days, to raise a sufficient Force against a powerful, inveterate, and successful Enemy, out of the ten Tribes on this Side *Jordan*, and to reach the Besieged on the other; and that he not only appeared there, at the Head of 330,000 armed Men before the Expiration of the time, but that he forecast his Matters with such uncommon Prudence, as to surprise them on the very Morning in which they expected the City, with all its Inhabitants, to have been delivered up into their Hands; and, by falling upon them on every Side, to give them such a total Overthrow, as put at once an End to that threatening War; I say, if you

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you duly weigh all these Circumstances together, you must be forced to own it to be one of the most considerable Actions that can be met with in any Historian, either sacred or profane; especially if you add to it, that the whole Design was conducted by a young Monarch, who had hardly reigned three Months when he went upon this Enterprize; had been till then conversant only in rural Affairs; and was still wholly unaccustomed to martial Feats; and at a time when the *Hebrews* laboured under the most grievous and discouraging Circumstances, as you will hear by and by. Only give me Leave to observe to you here, that this Transaction, great, important, and surprizing, as it was, is nevertheless transmitted to us here by the inspired Penman, not in the pompous and swollen Language of profane Historians, but in the plainest and most unaffected Stile, and such as any one would deem much below the Dignity of the Subject, did we not certainly know this to be an Excellency peculiar to the sacred Penmen, and which is not to be met with in any but their inspired Writings.

I doubt not but most of you have read this singular Piece of sacred History over and over; and yet I much question, whether any of you have looked upon it as any other than a plain Relation of some notable Fact, transacted long ago; and in which you, at this Distance, are little or not at all concerned, beyond the bare Knowledge of it. And may it not be chiefly owing to the artless and inimitable Simplicity, with which it is recorded by the sacred Historian, that you have overlooked the most surprising and remarkable Circumstances of it, which could not so easily have escaped you, had they been introduced with those florid Strokes of Rhetoric, which Historians commonly deal in, when they want to raise our Attention or Admiration? But if that be the Case, it is no Wonder, I must plainly tell you, that you read the Scriptures to so little Purpose; and I hope I shall do you no inconsiderable Service, if what I have to say on this Subject proves an Inducement to you, to make you admire them the more, and to peruse them with greater Reverence, as well as Profit, for their being thus divested from all artful Ornament,

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nament, but that of Conciseness, and Simplicity of Stile. For tho' this peculiar Excellency of theirs hath often exposed them to the Cavils and Ridicule of some bold Critics, and daring Infidels: yet it hath never failed, upon the strictest Search, and most impartial Scrutiny, of making their Authority appear the more venerable, and worthy of our deepest Regard. A lively Instance of which I shall now give you, in the surprising Exploit mentioned in my Text: For the further Display of which I propose,

In the first Place, To lay before you all the Difficulties that attended it, and have been, or may be, objected against the Possibility of the Fact,

2dly, To shew you how those Difficulties, great and insurmountable as they are represented by some late Critics, may have been overcome with Ease by the Jewish Monarch, by means of the excellent Laws, and martial Discipline, then known among the Hebrews; and by the strict and prudent Use he made of them, upon that Emergency, in order to cause

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cause his Summons to be obeyed with a suitable Readiness and Dispatch.

3dly, And, by way of Application, I shall not scruple to remind you, in the strongest Terms, not only of the Shame and Disgrace, but the complicated Danger, to which your Disobedience and Disloyalty will expose you, should you, in spite of the bright and encouraging Example I am going to set before your Eyes, still persist in a shameless Disregard of your Duty to your King and Country, on so pressing an Occasion as this to which you are called,

1st, then, I am to lay before you the vast, unsurmountable Difficulties, that attended this Expedition of the new *Hebrew* Monarch, in the timely Relief of his distressed Subjects. For these, upon Examination, will be found to have been such, in the Eyes of some otherwise learned Critics, as exceeded all Probability, or even Possibility, with regard to their having been ever surmounted in the manner, and in the short Space of Time, that the divine Historian assures us they were. So that some of them have made no Scruple to say,
the

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the Relation would have been as much above their Belief, as it was above their Comprehension, had it not been transmitted to us by an inspired Penman. These Difficulties, therefore, I shall, for Order's sake, reduce under the three following Heads: 1. The disadvantageous and distracted State which the *Hebrew* Commonwealth was in, at the breaking out of this *Ammonitish* War. 2. The Unlikelihood there is that the *Ammonitish* King should grant the besieged *Jabeshites* even that poor Respite of seven Days; or, if he did, that he should be so remiss in that martial Discipline, for which his Nation was no less famed than the *Hebrews*, as to have no kind of Intelligence of *Saul*, and his Army, being in full March against him; but suffer himself to be surprised, surrounded, and cut in Pieces, by three distinct Bodies, consisting in all of 330,000 Men. And, 3. The Improbability, or rather Impossibility, of *Saul's* raising so vast an Army, out of the ten Tribes on this Side *Jordan*, and conducting them to the Enemy's Camp, in so short a Space as five or six Days, which is the utmost Length of time he had to do it in.

1st, As to the disadvantageous and distracted State the *Hebrews* were in, at the breaking out of this unexpected War, I must observe to you, that though the Divine Providence had signally displayed itself in their Favour, since the late dreadful Overthrow of the *Philistines*, by the grievous Plagues he sent, successively, to each of their five Cantons, during the seven Months in which the sacred Ark remained amongst them (a); and more particularly afterwards, when *Samuel's* Prayer obtained for them that signal and miraculous Victory over the same Enemy, which enabled them to recover all the Fortresses which they had taken from them (b); yet they were no sooner threatened with this new War, than they assembled themselves before that Prophet, and, in an obstinate and tumultuous manner, insisted upon being thenceforth governed by a King, like other Nations; by which they not only introduced a new kind of Government, till then unknown among them, which could not be done without creating some Disorder and Confusion,

(a) 1 Sam. iv. v. & seq. pass.

(b) Ibid, cap. vii. pass.

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Confusion, altogether incompatible with their present distressed State; but, at the same time, cast from them that divine Assistance, which had so manifestly display'd itself in their Favour, and of which they never stood in greater need, than at this Juncture (b). And tho' God did indeed vouchsafe to yield to their unreasonable Request, yet it was in such a manner, as gave them little Hopes of bettering their Condition by their Change; and accordingly *Samuel* failed not to expose their Folly and Ingratitude, as well as God's Resentment, in the strongest Terms, for thus casting off the Divine Government and Protection, to put themselves under that of a weak Mortal. So that when the Prophet came to acquaint them with the News of *Saul's* being appointed King over them, they conceived such small Hopes of him, that they began to think themselves in a worse Case than they were before, and him to be set over them, rather for a Punishment, than a Defender. He was indeed taller than the rest, by the Head and Shoulder (c); but, unless his Courage and Conduct were equal to

(b) 1 Sam. viii. 5, & seq.

(c) Ibid. ix. 2.

to his Stature, it only exposed him the more to the Shots of the Enemy. And what Likelihood was there, that they should entertain any such Hopes of a young Man, whose Education, till then, had never reached higher than the Plough and Cart; and whose sheepish Behaviour, in hiding himself among his Father's Lumber, to avoid being introduced to the People (*d*), shewed nothing less than a Soul fit to take the Reins of Government over such a stubborn Nation, and at such a critical Juncture? To which if we add, that *Kish* his Father, who must be best acquainted with him, could find no better Employment for him, than to send him in quest of some straggling Asses (*e*); and that he did not exempt him from following his rural Business, even after he had been declared King by *Samuel*, at the Head of all the Tribes (*f*); we shall see little Reason to suppose, that they could expect any greater Feats from him, either on this, or any other, Emergency, than those Malecontents did, who, in a scoffing manner, cried out, *How shall this*

(*d*) 1 Sam. x. 22.

(*e*) *Ibid.* ix. 3.

(*f*) *Ibid.* xi. 5.

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this Man save us? and refused to pay him the Compliments and Presents usual on the like Occasions (g).

If we now look upon the Condition the People were in, at the breaking out of this War, we shall find it to the full as melancholy and unpromising, as that of their despised new Monarch. *Josephus* informs us (h), that the distressed *Jabeshites* had sent in vain to implore the Assistance of the two Tribes and half on the other Side *Jordan*; and that not a Soul dared stir Hand or Foot to their Relief. And the Text tells us, that when their Messengers reached the City of *Gibeah*, the Place of *Saul's* Residence, and acquainted the Inhabitants with their extreme Distress, they could only have recourse to their Cries (i); which plainly shews, that their Hearts were readier to bewail, than to assist, those poor Sufferers; who, on their Part, were so far sunk into Despondency, that, instead of resolving to die Sword in Hand, in Defence of their

(g) 1 Sam. x. 27.

(h) Antiq. l. vi. c. 5. *ad fin.*

(i) 1 Sam. xi. 4.

their Liberty, they had already engaged themselves to submit to a base and ignominious Slavery, if they could not obtain some timely Assistance from their Brethren on this Side (k). How improbable is it therefore, how absurd, to suppose that the whole Hebrew Nation, depending and unprepared as they were for such an Exploit, should agree, as *one Man*, so the Text expresses it (l), to follow such a Novice of a Monarch, to the Number of 330,000, on so difficult and dangerous an Expedition, and against a warlike and inveterate Enemy, who had been, for many Years, premeditating this War, and making all the necessary Preparations for, as well as made already such a considerable Progress in it ! Especially if we add to all this, the great Distance of some of the ten Tribes to the Place of Rendezvous, and the apparent Unlikelihood, not to say Impossibility, of their reaching the Besiegers Camp soon enough to save the City. And thus much may suffice for the first Kind of Difficulties which are objected against the Probability of this Piece of sacred History, from the

(k) 1 Sam. xi. 3.

(l) Ibid. ver. 7.

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the disadvantageous and distracted State of the *Hebrew Commonwealth*, at this Juncture:

2dly, The next is drawn from the great Unlikelihood, that the *Ammonitish* King should grant the reduced *Jabeshites* even so poor a Respite as seven Days; or, allowing that he did so, that he should be so remiss in his martial Discipline, and be so void of all Intelligence of *Saul*, and his great Army, being in full March against him, as to suffer himself to be surpris'd, surrounded, and cut in Pieces, by three such vast Bodies as his Army consisted of. For, with relation to the first, the antient Hatred between the two Nations of *Ammon* and *Israel*, which was still more exasperated by the total Overthrow which *Jephthah*, the *Hebrew* Hero, gave them, about fifty Years before, makes it but too probable, that they undertook this War with a full Design of taking a severe Revenge on them for that signal Victory (A). And the unmerciful Terms which

Nabash

(A) This cruel Contest of the *Ammonites*, for the

Land of *Gilead*, is elegantly described by the Prophet
X *Amos*

Nabash their King imposed on the *Jabeshites*, make it very unlikely, that he should be so easily prevailed upon to suspend his Resentment so long as seven Days; much more that, having agreed to grant them that Reprieve, he should not be more attentive to what was transacting on the other Side of the River, than to suffer himself to be thus shamefully surprised by the *Hebrew* Monarch, at the Head of so numerous an Army. This is the second Difficulty that is objected against the Probability of this Expedition, as it is related by the sacred Historian; and to which I shall endeavour to give likewise a sufficient Answer in its proper Place. But,

3dly, The third and last Objection is still stronger; and is urged, not only against the Probability, but even against the Possibility, of the Fact; as it is circumstantiated by the sacred Penman. It is drawn from the Shortness

Amos (C. i. Ver. 13, & seq.) by their ripping open the pregnant Women (or, as the Original likewise imports, and the Margin of our Bibles translates it, their tearing open the

Mountains) of *Gilead*: For which that Prophet denounces utter Destruction against the *Ammonitish* King, and his whole Kingdom.

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ness of the Time allowed for completing so signal a Deliverance, compared with the Distance of the several Places to which *Saul's* dreadful Summons were directed; the Space of Time required for such a vast Army to be equipped, and ready for a March; and the Length of the Way they had to go, to reach the Place of Rendezvous, and thence to come at the Camp of the Besiegers. To make this the more plainly to appear, it must be observed, 1st, That the besieged City of *Jabesh* could stand at no less Distance from *Gibeah*, the Place of *Saul's* Residence, than between sixty and seventy of our Miles; but perhaps considerably more, if we add to it the Mountainousness of the Country, the Windings and Turnings of the Roads, and the like: So that allowing the seven Days Time to have been granted to the Besieged ever so early in the Morning, their Messengers can hardly be supposed to have reached *Gibeah*, till the Evening of the next Day. *Saul* therefore could have but five more Days to summon the ten Tribes to Arms; some of which, especially on the South Side, were above an hundred Miles from *Gibeah*, and above an hundred and sixty from *Bezek*, the

X 2 Place

Place appointed for the general Rendezvous (B); where, nevertheless, upon a Review of the whole Army, they were found to amount to 300,000 effective Men, besides 30,000 more of the Tribe of *Judah* (m). From *Bezek* they had still four or five Miles to *Bethshean*, where they were to cross the *Jordan*;

(m) 1 *Sam.* xi. 8.

(B) *Gibeah*, the Birth-place and Residence of *Saul*, was situate pretty near the Centre, between the North and South Borders of *Dan* and *Beersheba*, and between six and eight Miles North of *Jerusalem*, according to *Josephus*, *Eusebius*, and *St. Jerom.* From *Gibeah* to *Bethshean*, the Place where the Army was to cross the *Jordan*, were about sixty more; and *Bezek*, the Place of Rendezvous, was situate within two or three Miles from *Bethshean*. The Authors above-mentioned take Notice of two Towns, of the Name of *Bezek*, but place them only within a Mile or two from each other: So that which of the two so-

ever it was that *Saul* pitched upon, for the Meeting of his Army, their Distance from *Bethshean* could not be above five or six Miles at most; and from this last to *Jabesh-Gilead*, may be computed about ten or twelve more; for there is no coming at any Exactness, as to the true Distance of those Places; and it will be sufficient, if we can, by the most equitable Computation we can make from the Authors above-quoted, and from *Reland*, and other Moderns, explode the pretended Impossibility of *Saul's* performing the Exploit above-mentioned within the Time limited by the sacred Historian.

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dan; and from thence about ten or twelve more, to reach the *Ammonitish* Camp; which, considering the Vastness of the Army, and the Mountainousness of the Canton of *Gilead*, could hardly take up less than a whole Day's March more (C). This being allowed, it will follow, that *Saul's* Summons must have reached the ten Tribes, and these must have armed and assembled themselves, under their respective Standards, and have reached the Place of Rendezvous, within the short Space of four Days; or even less than that: For the Text expressly says, that they were all got thither soon enough to be reviewed by their Monarch, which must take some considerable

X 3

time;

(C) *Josephus* still encreases the Difficulty, by making the *Hebrew* Army to have consisted of 700,000 Men, besides 70,000 of the of the Tribe of *Judah* (1); which, if true, must have still required a much longer time, in mustering, in crossing the *Jordan*, and in marching through the Windings, and narrow Defiles, of the mountainous

Canton of *Gilead*. But we see no Reason for preferring his Authority to that of the Text, especially as he so often betrays a particular Fondness for magnifying every thing that he thinks contributes to the Honour of his Nation, tho' at the Expence of Truth, and in Contradiction to the *Hebrew* Text.

(1) *Antiq.* l. vi. c. 6.

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time; after which he had still his Messengers to send to the besieged *Jabeshites*, with the Assurance of an effectual Relief by the next Morning's Dawn, before he could decamp from *Bezek* to their Assistance. All these things duly weighed, and the Distance considered between *Gibeab*, from which the Summons were dispatched to the remotest Tribes, both Northward and Southward, most of which could hardly be less than an hundred Miles; and from these latter, to *Bezek*, the Place to which they were to repair, by a March of at least an hundred and forty Miles, through some Deserts, craggy Mountains, long and difficult Defiles; it must appear absolutely impossible to have been performed in so short a time; For, allowing *Saul's* Messengers to have travelled Night and Day, and with the utmost Dispatch, no less than a Day and an half can be allowed to them, to have reached the remotest Tribes; so that these could have, at most, but two Days and an half more, to assemble themselves under their Chiefs, and to reach the Place of Rendezvous, through so long and difficult a Tract of Ground. Who therefore that barely considers, what a long while it requires

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requires now-a-days, to raise and fit up an Army of 30 or 40,000 Men among us, or even to equip a General, to appear at the Head of them, can ever imagine, that so raw and unexperienced a Monarch as *Saul*, should ever have been able to raise one, of almost ten times that Number, out of so many distant Tribes; much less to lead them, armed *Cap-à-pé*, against so powerful an Enemy; and with such Speed and Secrecy, as to fall unexpectedly upon them, and give them such a signal Overthrow, as put an effectual End to the threatening War, and to all future Hostilities from that Quarter, during his whole Reign? And to perform all this, in a smaller Number of Days, than a much less difficult and important Enterprize would have taken up Months amongst us (D). Thus far goes the Objection of our Hypercritics, against the Possibility

(D) That is, within the short Space of five, or, at most, six Days, from the time that *Saul* received the News of the Siege of *Jabelh*; which, the Text tells us, was in the Even-

ing, as he was returning from his rural Affairs (1). For, considering the Distance from that City to *Gibeah*, it is hardly credible, that the Messengers could reach it on the same Day

X 4

(1) 1 Sam. xi. 5.

Possibility of the Fact; to which I doubt not, nevertheless, to give such a full Answer, as will leave no room for doubting of the Feasibleness of it, when duly weighed with the excellent Constitution, and martial Discipline, of the *Hebrew* Nation; a Circumstance with which the Objectors seem not to have been sufficiently acquainted, or, at least, not to have paid due Attention to. But I am, under this next general Head, to remove the two grand Difficulties that are raised against the Probability of the sacred Narrative.

3dly, then, In Answer to the first of these Difficulties, drawn from the disadvantageous Situation of the *Hebrew* Commonwealth, at the breaking out of this *Ammonitish* War, both with respect to the apparent Inability of their new Monarch, and the Despondency of the People, on account of their late Defection from God; might not the severe Threats which *Samuel* pronounced against them, which we find extorted so humble and pathetic a Confession from them of their Guilt

Day in which the Truce was granted; and if on the next, then had he no more than five Days to

raise, lead, and dispose, his numerous Host, for attacking the Enemy.

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Guilt and Ingratitude, prove a moſt effectual Spur to that uncommon Readineſs, with which they complied with *Saul's* Commands? However, it will be ſufficient here to obſerve to you in general, that the whole Affair appears plainly to have been conducted by the Divine Providence, and with the ſame gracious and conſtant View, of reducing that ungrateful and rebellious People to their Obedience to, and ſteady Dependence on him; from both which they had ſo ſhamefully ſwerved, during the latter End of *Eli* their Judge and High-Prieſt's remiſs Government; and as a due Punishment for which, he had ſuffered them to be thus depressed at this time (n). The Book of *Judges* furniſhes us with many ſignal Inſtances of the like Nature, wherein God was pleaſed to ſuffer them to ſink into the loweſt State of Slavery and Deſpondency, for their frequent Deſections and Idolatries; and afterwards to raiſe them to their priſtine Freedom, and prosperous State, by ſuch unlikely and diſparate means, as might beſt direct their Eyes and Hearts to him. This we find was the Caſe, when he delivered them from their ſeveral Thral-

doms,

(n) 1 *Sam.* ii. 27, & ſeq. iii, 11, & ſeq. iv. paſſ.

doms, under the Conduct of *Deborah* and *Barack*, of *Gideon*, *Jephthah*, and others of their Chiefs (o). And let me add here, that as the People never stood in greater Need of such a gracious *Memento*, than at this time, when, in the Height of all their Distress, they seem to have so far cast off the Divine Protection, as to put their sole Hope and Remedy in having a King set over them, for their Deliverer; so nothing could be more proper to reduce them from their misplaced Confidence, than the giving them such an unpromising one as *Saul* was; and then, upon the very first Emergency, to inspire him with such unexpected Fortitude and Conduct; and to crown it with such wonderful and un-hoped for Success. For this could hardly fail of inspiring both King and People with a fresh and surer Trust and Dependence on God, above any human Help. Accordingly, you may remember, that God had taken care to encourage the new Monarch with such a kind of Promise, from the very Beginning, by the Mouth of his Prophet, in these Words: *And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt become another*

(o) *Vid. int. al. Jud. vii. 2, & seq.*

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another Man; and let it be, when these things are come unto thee, that thou do as Occasion shall require; for God is with thee (p). In consequence of which Divine Assurance it was, no doubt, that Saul, on his returning from the Field, and hearing the Outcries of the People, on account of the *Jabelshites*, felt such an uncommon Warmth at their Distress, as well as Resentment against the pusillanimous and desponding *Gibeathites*, that he immediately ordered the two Bullocks to be hewn in Pieces, and sent to each Tribe, with the dreadful Summons mentioned in my Text; *Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his Oxen.* The Result of which was, that they were struck with Fear and Dread, and made so quick a Dispatch to join him at the Place of Rendezvous, that they were all got thither, from every Tribe, with one Consent, a Day at least before the Expiration of the Truce, and to the Number of 330,000 effective Men. How easily this might be performed, is what I shall shew under another Head: In the mean time I cannot but observe to you, from what hath been said under this,

as

(p) 1 Sam. x. 6, & 7.

as well with respect to the generous and heroic Spirit which *Saul* display'd on this pressing Occasion, and the extraordinary Readiness with which the People obeyed his Summons, as with respect to the wonderful Success with which both were crowned, that the Whole plainly appears to have been the Work of the Divine Providence. For as to the first, the Text expressly affirms, that *the Spirit of God came upon Saul*; and it is hardly to be supposed, that any thing but such an extraordinary Impulse, could have frightened his heartless and desponding Subjects into so ready, quick, and universal, Compliance with his Commands; especially as the Danger that threatened them was so far off, *Jabesh* being on the other Side *Jordan*, and at a good Distance from the greatest Part of the Tribes; and the Loss of it not appearing to them of such Consequence, as to require so quick a Dispatch, had there been a much greater Probability of their succeeding in their Attempt to relieve it. So that, upon the Whole, it cannot be doubted, that God intended, by this singular Display of his Providence, to signalize the first warlike Essay of his new Anointed, in such a manner, as
should

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should inspire his People with a due Regard to him, and both him and them with a more sure and stedfast Reliance on the Divine Protection, as well as a warmer Zeal for his Religion, than they had hitherto shewn for it; more especially since that shameful and universal Degeneracy, which the Wickedness of *Eli's* and *Samuel's* Sons had caused among them. In all this there is nothing but what is exactly uniform and agreeable to the Conduct which the Divine Providence had shewn already, upon several Occasions of the like Nature; and more particularly in the Cases of *Moses*, *Joshua*, *Gideon*, *Jephthah*, and other *Jewish* Chiefs; and what he continued still to shew, since then, in favour of many of their Monarchs. And this is, indeed, what the Prophet took care to inculcate into them, in the strongest Terms, in that pathetic Speech which he made to them, soon after the signal Overthrow of *Nabash*, and his Host; wherein he assures them, that provided they did cast off all their vain and superstitious Confidence in their Idols, and false Deities, and trust in God alone, and abide in his Truth, they should never fail of his Assistance

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ance and Protection (q): But, concludes he, in the last Verse, if ye shall still go on to do wickedly, ye shall surely be consumed, both ye and your King. And thus much may, I hope, suffice, for an Answer to the first Difficulty.

2dly, I come now to the second, which is objected against the Probability of the Fact; viz. the Unlikelihood there is that *Nabash*, who breathed nothing but Ignominy and Destruction against *Israel*, should yet be prevailed upon to grant to the *Jabeshites* even that short Reprieve of seven Days; and much more, that, having once granted it, he should keep so bad a Look-out, as to be wholly ignorant of what was transacting on the other Side *Jordan*, and suffer his Camp to be surprised and surrounded by *Saul*, and his Army, on the very Morning on which he expected the City to be delivered up to him: But as surprising and uncommon soever as that Oversight may appear, we meet with Instances enough of it, in sacred and profane History, and even among modern and warlike Nations, to confute the pretended Improbability of it.

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(q) 1 Sam. xii. pass. & ver. 20, & seq.

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I shall here only remind you of that signal Infatuation of the *French* General, Count *Tallard*, who, when he might easily have opposed the confederate Army, under the late glorious Duke of *Marlborough*, from passing the *Rhine*, to come at him, did yet suffer them to cross that rapid River unmolested; alleging, that the more should come over to them, the more would be either killed or taken; the Consequence of which egregious Oversight, you may well remember, was the total Defeat of the *French* Army at *Hockstedt*, the Taking of their insolent General Prisoner, with a prodigious Number of other commanding Officers of Distinction, and the Saving of the Empire from the most impending Danger.

But were this presumptuous Negligence of the *Ammonitish* King even without any Parallel, yet, when duly weighed with all its Circumstances, it will appear far enough from having any thing that can exceed your Belief. *Josephus* tells us, in few Words, that *Nabash* had so mean an Opinion of the *Israelites* at this Juncture, that he made no Difficulty to comply with the Besiegers Request.

quest. And if we look upon the despicable Figure which, as I observed to you, the *Jews* made, at this time, under their new Government and Monarch, we shall find nothing among them, but what might contribute to lull that inveterate Enemy into the fatal Security, in which they so happily surprised him. Had even *Saul* ever shewn himself a Man of a more martial Disposition, yet what Likelihood was there, that he should raise so powerful an Army, in so short a time; or be in a Condition to attack the Enemy in their Camp, before the Expiration of so short a Truce? Where is then the Wonder, that *Nabash* should consent to suspend his Cruelty for so little a while, when he had no other Prospect before him, than that of executing it with greater Satisfaction, at the End of it? Whereas might he not have some Cause to fear, lest an absolute Refusal of their Request should force the Besieged upon some desperate Attempt, to save their Lives and Liberty; which might cost him the Loss of a good Number of his Troops, or, at least, prove of much worse Consequence

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quence to him, than a seven Days Respite could, all things considered, be possibly supposed to do. It is hardly credible, indeed, that the *Ammonites* should be wholly unapprised of the Motions of the ten Tribes on this Side the River ; but that they should be intended for the Relief of the Besieged, much less that there should be any Possibility of their reaching the Place time enough to effect it, is what never could come into their Heads ; and the most they could apprehend from them was, that they were intended to oppose their farther Progress. It is also no less unreasonable to suppose, that so warlike and well-disciplined a Nation should be without their Piquet, their Vanguard, Scouts, Spies, and other martial Precautions, at that Juncture ; and all these they may have had, and yet several unforeseen Accidents may have concurred, thro' the Policy of the *Hebrew* Monarch, to render them ineffectual, if not, perhaps, contribute to their Indolence, and fatal Security. *Saul*, and some of the Tribes, might take the Advantage of their Nearness to the Place of Rendezvous, to secure all the Passes and Defiles leading from *Jordan* to the Enemy's Camp, and

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thereby

thereby intercept all kind of Intelligence of his Approach from reaching them; which would, of course, make them think themselves the more secure, upon that very Account: They might, in all Likelihood, be still more confirmed in it, by those very Messengers whom *Saul* sent to acquaint the Besieged on the Night before his Arrival, with his Design of attacking the Enemy by the next Morning: For, whilst they were carrying the most comfortable and encouraging News to the Besieged, they might take that Opportunity to spread a contrary Report thro' the Besiegers Camp; and make them believe, that neither *Saul*, nor any of his Tribes on the other Side, had either Power or Courage to come to their Assistance. But that which, in all Appearance, contributed most to lull them asleep, was the subtle Message which the *Jabeshites* sent to the *Ammonitish* King; That, having in vain implored the Help of their Brethren on the other Side *Jordan*, they had now no other Resource left, than to march out by the next Morning, and cast themselves at his Mercy: For this News, being once spread throughout the Camp, could hardly fail of rendering both Guards and Centinels more remiss and negligent.

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There was still a further Stratagem, not unusual in those early Days, which *Saul* might use with Success, in order to fall upon them unawares; viz. fetching a Compass about, instead of taking the nearest Way to them, which he might the more easily do, as he marched his Army in several Columns (E); and most probably under the Guidance of some of those *Jabeshites*, who had been deputed to apprise him with their Distress, and who must be supposed to have been best acquainted with all the Avenues to it, as well as with the Situation of the Enemy's Camp. So that by continuing their March all that Night, and with as little

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Noise

(E) This was a Method very usual, as well as necessary, in these mountainous Countries, where the frequent Defiles, and narrow Passes, must otherwise have obstructed the Quickness of the March of a whole Army; considering how numerous they were wont to be, in those Days. And as for that of dividing them into two, three, or more Bodies, as Occasion required, in order to surprise an Enemy, we find it was practised even so early as *Abraham's* time, and with good Success; tho' his whole Force, we are told, consisted only of 318 of his own Servants, and, in all Likelihood, about much the same Number of those of his two Confederates (1).

(1) *Conf. Genes. xiv. 13, & seq. & vers. 24.*

Noise as possible, he might with Ease come upon them unperceived and unexpected; till their surrounding Shouts waked them, perhaps, out of their profound Sleep; and the succeeding Day-light discovered them on every Side of their Camp, and ready to rush upon them with all their Might. In the Confusion, which must be reasonably supposed to have reigned thro' the whole Host of the Besiegers, we may likewise expect, that the *Jabeshites* would not fail to make good their Promise of coming out to them, and falling upon their Rear, whilst their Front and Flanks were no less bravely plied by *Saul's* three powerful Corps. No Wonder then, if, with all these Advantages, the *Hebrews* gained so signal and easy a Victory, and made such a dreadful Slaughter among them; which, the Text tells us, lasted from Sun-rising, till the Heat of the Day obliged them to give it over (s); by which time those that escaped were so effectually scattered, that two of them were not left together. Nothing indeed was more frequent among the *Hebrews*, than this politic Way of surprising the Enemy by their swift Marches; by which

(s) 1 Sam. xi. 10, & seq.

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which they injected such a Panic among them, as seldom failed of ending in their total Defeat. And it was by that very Method, that *Joshua*, the most confirmate General of his time, won so many signal Victories over the united Forces of the *Canaanites*. Witness that celebrated one, which he gained over the five confederate Kings, who had joined their numerous Forces against the *Gibeonites* (q); and that still more surprising one, which he gained, with his small flying Army, over the King of *Hazor*, and his confederate Princes, at the Waters of *Merom*; though their Force, the Text assures us (r), consisted of a vast Number of Chariots, and Horsemen, and Foot, as numerous as the Sand of the Sea: Of all which I have given you a full Account, in a foregoing Letter. *Josephus* more distinctly tells us (s), that it consisted of 300,000 Foot, 10,000 Horse, and 2,000 Chariots of War. Against which numerous Host he marches, with the Choice of his Troops, with such swift and long Strides, that he comes unexpectedly upon them; and falling upon them, accord-

(q) *Joshua* x. pass.

(r) *Ibid.* xi. 4. See *Essay* iii. p. 215, & seq.

(s) *Antiq.* l. v. c. 1.

ing to Custom, in three or four distinct Bodies, gives them a total Defeat, seizes upon their Camp, burns all their Chariots, hamstring their Horses, and, having totally dispersed those that escaped from the Sword, becomes, by that single Action, Master of a considerable Tract of Ground, and of such a Number of fortified Cities, as would, in all Likelihood, have taken up some Years to reduce by regular Sieges. (1) But to return to Saul's Victory: Josephus adds, that Nabash, the Ammonitish King, was slain, and that Saul, not content with this signal Victory, and the timely Deliverance of Jabez, pursued the War against them, laid their Country waste, enriched his Army with the Spoil, and brought back his victorious Troops safe to their respective Homes (2), laden with Glory and Plunder. However, that because the Ammonites were so humbled by this signal Overthrow, that we do not read of any farther Hostilities between them, during the Remainder of Saul's Reign; nor indeed till the latter End of that of David; when Hanun, their newly crowned Monarch, did by an unheard of Affront offered to his Embassadors,

(1) *Antiq. l. vi, c. 6.*

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bassadors, provoke that warlike Prince to use them with much greater Severity (u). Thus far then, I hope, I have fully removed the two first Difficulties, which are objected against the Probability of this remarkable Exploit.

I come now to the third and last, in which our Unbelievers seem to triumph over us, with a *Credat Judæus*; and is levelled not only against the Probability, but against the Possibility, of the Fact, as related and circumstantiated by the sacred Historian; that is, as you have already heard, the Shortness of the Time in which it is affirmed to have been effected. For if we allow, that the *Jabeshites* Messengers could not reach *Saul* till after the second Evening of the Truce, it will of Necessity follow, that he had but five Days more to send his Summons to every Part of his Kingdom, on this Side *Jordan*, and to get his vast numerous Army punctually ready, upon the Spot, at the general Rendezvous; which, considering the Length of the Way, and other obvious Difficulties, must needs make such a March appear altogether

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impracticable.

(u) 1 Kings x. xi. *pass.*

impracticable. And so it must needs appear to those; who only reflect on the Time that it would take up, to raise an Army of even the tenth Part of that Bulk among us, and to get it ready equipped, and fit for Action, as this was; and that an equal Number of Months would hardly suffice now-a-days, to fit out one of our Generals to appear at the Head of it. But the *Hebrews* were, in this respect, under much better Regulations, and a more excellent Discipline; and so they had need indeed; considering that they were not only surrounded, on all Sides, with such warlike and powerful Enemies, but likewise intermixed, within, with a great Number of others, equally inveterate, and ready to join Hands with the rest, in every hostile Attempt against them (F). Is it therefore a Wonder, that

(F) The *Israelites* were encompassed on the North by the *Syrians*, on the East by the *Ammonites* and *Moabites*, on the South by the *Edomites* and *Amalekites*; and on the West most of their Coasts were hemmed in by the *Philistines*; and the rest lay exposed to Invasion from the *Tyrians*,

Sidonians, *Egyptians*, and other maritime Nations; all of them ill affected, and the far greater Part irreconcilable Enemies, to them. And as for the old *Canaanite* Nations, who still lived within the Bowels of their Land, and were tributary to them, tho' they were still permitted to have their own Kings,

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that a Nation so situate, so hated, and surrounded by such a Variety of warlike Enemies, should take all proper Methods to secure itself, as much as possible, from being surpris'd or overpowered by them?

But this is not all : They had, from their first coming out of *Egypt*, been inured to an excellent martial Discipline under *Moses*; who, besides his being thoroughly instructed in all the Wisdom of *Egypt*, had acted all along under the Direction of the Divine Providence. So that nothing was more regular and admirable, than their Method of encamping, decamping, marching, and engaging; notwithstanding the whole *Israelitish* Host consisted of no less 600,000 fighting Men; that is, Males between twenty and sixty, besides those above and under that Age, Women, Servants, and an innumerable Mixture that followed their

Kings, such as *Araunah* was, in the Reign of *David* (1); these, I say, were still more dangerous Enemies than the rest; and their History but too plainly shews, how watchful they were of all Opportunities of retaliating upon them, and bringing them under the severest Subjection and Slavery (2).

(1) 2 Sam. xxiv. 20, & seq.

(2) See *Josh. pass.* *Judg.* i. ii. & seq. *pass.*

their Camp (*): All of which, put together, could hardly amount to less than three Millions of Souls. A prodigious Host indeed! to be led about, during forty whole Years, thro' such a Wilderness, and under such frequent Difficulties and Discouragements, by a single Person. All which could only be owing to that excellent Discipline which he had established among them; and to the Divine Interposition, and severe Punishments inflicted upon them, upon every murmuring or rebellious Attempt. Accordingly, as soon as they were directed, by the supernatural Cloud, for a new March, they had three Signals given through the whole Camp; the first, for taking up their Tents, and packing up their Baggage; the second, for summoning each Tribe to appear under their respective Standards and Chiefs, accoutred and armed, or to repair to the several other Posts assigned to them; and the last, for moving in such a Number of Columns, as they were directed, or as the Ground would permit. All which was performed with wonderful Order and Regularity; insomuch that this vast unwieldy Body hath, upon some Occasions, been

(*) See Exodus xii. 37, 38.

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been able to march eighteen or twenty Miles in one Day, before the fiery Pillar gave them the Signal to encamp. At which time they observed the same Order and Method for pitching their Tents; which, *Josephus* tells us, was done with such Exactness, that it resembled a most regular City, composed of as many Quarters as there were Tribes; with spacious Streets, Lanes, and all other Conveniences; whilst the sacred Ark was placed under the stately Tabernacle, in the Centre of the Whole; surrounded by regular Rows of Tents, belonging to *Moses*, *Aaron*, and the rest of the Priests and Levites; and placed at a due Distance from the rest of the Tribes.

This excellent *Mosaic* Discipline was, no Doubt, greatly improved afterwards, and adapted to the Exigencies of their present Settlement in *Canaan*, by their new General *Joshua*, a Person no less experienced in martial Affairs, and equally under the Divine Conduct with his Predecessor. Their dangerous Situation, among such vigilant and potent Enemies, challenged his utmost Attention to so important a Point; and had he not been directed by the Divine Providence, yet

yet Necessity must have been the Mother of Invention, and put him upon finding out all possible Ways and Methods of defending himself, and People, against all Surprizes, as well as public Attacks, from any Side; and, upon all such Emergencies, for conveying the Alarm through all the Tribes, at least those on this Side *Jordan*, in the most expeditious manner.

Now it is certain, that no Country was better furnished with wide and commodious Roads, for the Expedition of Messengers and Travellers, than theirs; and this owing chiefly to the Injunctions given by *Moses*, and closely followed by his worthy Successor *Joshua*, to have all the Roads leading, not only to the six Cities of Refuge on each Side the *Jordan*, for the innocent Man-slayers to flee to (y), but likewise those which led to the forty-eight Cities belonging to the Priests and Levites, and which were likewise Places of Sanctuary (z), kept wide, level, dry, and plain; with convenient Bridges over Rivers; Posts to direct Passengers from Place to Place; with all other

(y) *Nam. xxxv. 11, & seq. Deut. xix. 1, & seq.*

(z) *Num. xxxv. 1, & seq. Maimon. & al. Rabbin. de Afylis.*

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other necessary Conveniencies, to render their Travelling as easy and expeditious as possible. All which, though chiefly contrived for the Benefit of those who were obliged to flee to such Places of Refuge, yet equally contributed to the quick Dispatch of Couriers and Messengers, when sent from one Part of the Kingdom to another, upon any important Business; for those Cities and Sanctuaries, being scattered through the whole Country, and at proper Distances from each other, made it requisite to have the greater Number of those commodious Highways, in every Tribe; and these did not a little facilitate the Marches of their Armies from one Part of the Kingdom to the other, upon all Emergencies.

They had another Convenience likewise, for the quick Dispatch of their Intelligence; viz. by their Dromedaries; a Creature very common in all those Eastern Parts, and so swift-footed, that they were chiefly used for Expedition by the Rich; and we are told, that they commonly travelled 100 Miles, and some of them 150 Miles, a Day (a). And if so,
then

(a) *Vincent, Le Blanc's Travels, Part ii. c. 22.*

then might the *Jabeshite* Messengers reach *Saul* at *Gibeah* on the first Evening of the Truce; and this will give him one Day more to atchieve their Deliverance, than the Objectors seem willing to allow. But all this will still go but a little Way towards accounting for the prodigious Dispatch he made in sending his threatening Summons to all the ten Tribes, and they in joining him at the general Rendezvous; unless we can find out some still more expeditious Method, from their martial Discipline, for conveying the Alarm throughout the Kingdom, and for the summoned Tribes repairing to their respective Standards, armed and expedited for such a March.

As to the first, we may reasonably suppose, that the Alarm, or Summons for a general Armament, were conveyed thro' the Kingdom by Beacons, or fire Signals, kindled upon the Tops of the Hills; which, considering the Mountainousness of the Country, and the few Plains of any Length there were in it, might easily spread itself thro' every Part of it, in the Space of a few Hours. These Beacons we find often mentioned in

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in the Prophets; and were in use not only among the *Hebrews*, but among all the ancient Nations that were seated in hilly Countries (G); and, being easily perceived at a vast

(G) Of these five Signals, or Beacons, we find frequent Mention in the Prophets (1): They were placed on some Eminences, from which they conveyed the Alarm to the next, with surprising Swiftneſs; and where the Ground was too flat, they ſupplied that Defect by placing them on the Tops of ſome tall Trees, or Maſts, or on eminent Towers, which answered the ſame End. We may likewiſe reaſonably ſuppoſe them to have been diſtinguiſhed by ſome proper Difference, according to the Nature of the Notice they were to convey, and in order to direct the Alarm-trumpets in the lower Lands to ſpread it, by their proper and reſpective Sounds; of which they had a Variety, according to the various Exigencies for

which they were blown. For, in ſome Caſes, only two or three Tribes were to be ſummoned to Arms, as in the Caſe of *Deborah*, *Gideon*, *Jephthah*, &c.; and in others, as in that of all the Tribes againſt the *Benjamites* (2), and in that we are upon, the whole Nation was to appear in Arms. They ſeem likewiſe, from the different Names uſed by the inſpired Writers, to have had another Sort, probably for the Day-time, when the fire ones could not be ſo eaſily perceived; and theſe were Enſigns, differently diſplayed on thoſe Eminences, anſwering, in ſome Sort, to thoſe uſed at Sea; and ſerving to convey the Summons to the low Lands, with much the ſame Expectation.

(1) *Vid. int. al. Iſai. v. 26. xi. 10, & ſeq. xlii. 2. xviii. 3. xxx. 17. xlix. 22. lxii. 10. Jerem. ix. 6. l. 2. li. 12. 17. & alib. paſſ. Zechar. ix. 16.*

(2) *Jud. xix. 29, & ſeq. xx. 1, & ſeq.*

vast Distance from each other, especially in the Night-time, and being moreover distinguished by some well known Difference, according to the Notice or Orders they were to convey, were immediately answered by the Sounds of the Trumpets in the Valleys below ; so that not a City or Village, whether situate on high or low Ground, could be exempt from the general Alarm, or ignorant of the Design of it, either from the Nature of the Signal, or the different Sounding of the Trumpets, in a less Space than a Night. Whenever therefore the Import of the Alarm was for a general Armament, every Man that was able to bear Arms, being obliged, according to their martial Discipline, to repair with their proper Weapons and Accoutrements, to their respective Standards, under the severest Penalties ; they had nothing to do but to hasten to their Arms, and to furnish themselves with two or three Days Provisions for the Mouth ; which, being commonly of the dried Kind, such as Bread, parched Corn, Pulse, Figs, Raisins, Dates, and the like, was speedily got ; and to join their Brethren of the same Tribe, at the general Rendezvous belonging to it. Here they

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they were first mustered by their respective Chiefs, or Captains of Hundreds, of Thousands, and at last by the Head of the whole Tribe. After which they had nothing to do, but to wait till the Orders came from above, when and whither to begin their March. Thus, *Gibeah* being situate about the Centre of *Judea*, or at about an equal Distance from *Dan* and *Beersheba*, the two extreme Boundaries of it, North and South; it is reasonable to suppose, that the Alarm had reached both, by these expeditious Signals, long enough before the next Morning; whilst those that were seated nearer the Centre were, in all Likelihood, ready for March, as soon as they received their Orders and Route from their King or Chief: For I take it for granted, that these were not dispatched to every City and Village of the Kingdom; which would have required too long a time, as well as too great a Number of Couriers, but were communicated only at this general Rendezvous of each Tribe; and this, we may suppose, was at, or near, the Place of Residence of each respective Chief of it. For this we find was the Method which the *Levite* took to acquaint all the Tribes with the Indignity

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offered to his Concubine at *Gibeah*; viz. by sending to each of them a Piece of her mangled Body: And to each of these respective Assemblies it must reasonably be supposed to have been, that *Saul* dispatched his threatening Summons, accompanied with the Pieces of the hewn Oxen (H); which inspired them with such a general Dread, and
Readiness

(H) This last Circumstance seems very much to confirm my last Supposition, that the Orders, consequent to the general Alarm, were not sent to every City, Town, or Village, but only to such particular Places, as were appointed for the Men of each Tribe to repair to their respective Chiefs; else the two Oxen, though hewn ever so small, could hardly have sufficed them all: And much less so, if, as *Josephus* affirms, and the original Word seems to countenance his Version of it, *Saul* only cut off the Legs of the Oxen, and sent them by the Messengers (1). I may add, that the Expression which we translate, to all the Coasts of *Israel*, might be more

properly rendered, to every Boundary, or, perhaps, rather, to every Place fixed and assigned for a Boundary, between Tribe and Tribe; or that appointed for their general Assemblies, whether upon civil or military Affairs. Considering therefore the frequent and sudden Irruptions they were exposed to, from their Enemies within, and round about, them; there could not be a more expeditious Way found out, than for every Tribe to repair, armed and accoutred, to such appointed Places of Rendezvous, upon every Alarm, for a general Armament; and there to wait for further Orders from above, how to act, and whither to march.

(1) *Antiq.* l. vi. c. 6.

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Readiness to obey them. By this excellent and expeditious Way, those Tribes that were nearest to the Residence of their Judge or King, being the first that received both the Alarm, and Summons to Arms, could, in few Hours, be equipped, and ready to march to the Place appointed; and there begin to be reviewed, or even dispatched upon any necessary Expedition; whilst the more distant ones were daily arriving in their Turns, till they amounted to a sufficient Number for the designed Enterprize. Allowing therefore the Messengers of *Jabesh-Gilead* to have reached *Gibeah* on the first Evening of the Truce, and the general Alarm to have reached both Ends of the Kingdom in that one Night (both which I have shewn to have been very feasible); where, I pray you, is the Impossibility, or even Improbability, that the most distant Tribes from *Bezek*, the Place of Rendezvous, which were those of *Judah*, *Simeon*, and *Dan*, the farthest of which was not above 160 Miles, should reach it in the following six Days, or even in less time, considering that they might take the Advantage of marching in Columns, thro' a Country that abounded with Highways, kept easy and

plain for Expedition ; and that they had no other Luggage to retard them, than their Weapons and Provisions, nor any Enemies to obstruct their Way, or retard their Speed?

But farther let me observe to you here, that if we compare the Muster of *Saul's* Army upon this Occasion, with those we find recorded both before and since that time, we shall find it to come so far short of them (I), as to give us room to suppose, that he did not stay for the coming of those that were the most remote; but that finding those that were already arrived, by the last Day of the Truce, to be more than sufficient

(I) Thus we find, in the War which the Tribes undertook against the *Benjamites*, mentioned in the last Essay, they amounted to 400,000 effective Men, exclusive of that of *Benjamin* (1): Whereas here *Saul* had but 330,000. In a *Census* likewise which *David* caused to be made of all *Israel*, some time before his Death, the total Sum of *Israel* was 800,000, and of *Judah* 500,000 (2): So that the 30,000, which joined *Saul*, were but a small Part of what this last Tribe must have amounted to, had he staid for the rest; who, it is probable, being the most distant of all, were not able to reach him time enough, with all the Speed they could make; which, in this Case, was a sufficient Excuse.

(1) *Jud.* xx. 2.

(2) 1 *Kings* xxiv. 9.

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ficient for his Purpose, he gave immediate Orders for marching against the Enemy with all Speed, leaving the rest to come after as soon as they could ; since they were equally included in the Summons, and answerable for Non-attendance.

For I must take Leave here to remind you of another Piece of their Discipline, mentioned in a former Essay, as established among them by *Moses* and *Joshua* ; viz. that every Male, from twenty to sixty, was to be inrolled in his respective Tribe, and obliged to appear in Arms under his respective Standard, upon every such Alarm, under the severest Penalties ; unless hindered by Sickness, Lameness, or any other lawful Impediment (b). These Rolls were so carefully kept, not only by the Heads of every Tribe, but by the inferior Captains of the Hundreds and Thousands, and called over before and after the Engagement, that none could absent themselves without being discovered, and called to an Account for it. And this afforded a farther Conveniency, that, as there was

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(b) *What those other Impediments and Abatements from the Rigour of this martial Law were, the Reader may see, among other Places, in Deut. xx. 5, & seq.*

no Danger of their deserting, so there was no Necessity of their marching in large regular Bodies, unless it were through an Enemy's Country; but, in their own, they might safely move on towards the Rendezvous, in the most convenient or expeditious manner, as Occasion required, so they but reached it time enough to answer to their Names, at the general Review. Let me add, that the dreadful Catastrophe of the Inhabitants of this very City of *Jabesh*, who were all put to the Sword, except about 400 Virgins, for not having joined the rest of the Tribes in the War they waged against that of *Benjamin*, two or three Centuries before, is a plain Indication of the Severity with which they punished all such Defaults. So that the very Name of *Jabesh-Gilead* was enough, at this time, to remind the whole Nation of the Danger of disobeying *Saul's* pressing Commands. Thus, then, you see how possible, and even easy, it was for that Monarch to get such a numerous Army ready at the Place of Rendezvous, and to lead them against the Besiegers time enough before the Expiration of the Truce; which surprising Dispatch, however, was chiefly owing to the excellent Laws,

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Laws, and military Discipline, which had been established among them ; so that by the Help of it he was able to accomplish that, in five or six Days, which, without it, would have been impracticable in so many Weeks, and, in our Times, in so many Months. Hence therefore you may plainly see, it was not without good Grounds that I affirmed, that the pretended Impossibility, urged by our Critics, doth wholly proceed from their Ignorance of, or Inattention to, this Branch of the *Jewish* Constitution.

I may, therefore, by this time, presume to hope, that I have effectually removed every Difficulty that can be reasonably raised against the Truth of this remarkable and signal Transaction. However, it may justly appear, when considered in all its Circumstances, and surprising Success, to exceed any that we meet with, either in sacred or profane History. So that we need not wonder, that it should inspire the *Hebrews* with such extraordinary Regard for their new Monarch, that nothing less could now satisfy them, than the immediate Death of those Malecontents, who had lately affronted him

by their contemptuous Language and Behaviour (c): And had he been as vindictive and resenting, as they were now zealous for him, he must unavoidably have sullied the Glory of that noble Victory by such a mean and unworthy Piece of Revenge. But here also *Saul* shewed himself no less worthy to reign, by the singular and unhop'd for Moderation he displayed on this Occasion. *As the Lord liveth*, said he, *there shall no Man die this Day: For To-day the Lord hath wrought Salvation in Israel.* And it was no small Addition to his Glory, that he, who could shew such a prodigious Ardour and Eagerness to shed the Blood of his Enemies, should prove himself no less tender in sparing that of his very worst Subjects. Well might they triumph now, that they had a King indeed given to them by God! And such an one, as they might firmly hope would, upon all Occasions, behave as his chosen and worthy Vicegerent, whether in protecting his own People, suppressing their Enemies, or in the gaining the Love of such of his rebellious Subjects, by his signal Benignity, whom neither his Dignity, Valour, nor Conduct, could reduce.

(c) I Sam. xv. 17, & seq. xxii. 17, & seq.

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reduce to their Duty. Happy King! happy Subjects! happy in the Protection and Favour of the Divine Providence! happy in the Zeal and Harmony which now reigns between them, and the pleasing Prospect which they have now before them! But neither of them did continue long, either in this blissful Harmony, or under the Favour of their Almighty Protector. *Saul* grew proud, disobedient, and cruel (*d*); and was rejected by God; and the People, returning to their old Superstitions, and heathenish Idolatries, became such Dastards, and errant Cowards, that, upon the very next Danger that threatens them, instead of obeying his Summons, and following him against the Enemy, with the same Courage and Readiness they had done against the *Ammonites*, they only seek to *hide themselves in Caves and Dens, in Rocks, high Places, and Pits, or to cross over the Jordan into the Land of Gilead* (*e*): Insomuch that, when he came to number his small Force, he found it dwindled to 600 Men (*f*), and all of them destitute of warlike Weapons. So evidently were *Samuel's* Words verified in both,

(*d*) 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

(*e*) 1 Sam. xiii. 6, & seq.

(*f*) Ibid. ver. 15, & seq.

both, that their Success and Happiness would rise and fall, according to the Regard they paid to their Divine Protector.

But it is now high time for me to hasten to my last general Head ; wherein I promised to lay before you, by way of Application, both the Shame and Disgrace, and the complicated Danger, to which your Disobedience and Disloyalty must inevitably expose you, if you should still persist in imitating the cowardly *Israelites*, in this last Instance, of Despondency, and Disregard for the Safety of their King and Country, rather than in that noble and generous Eagerness, with which they accompanied their Prince to the Relief of their distressed Brethren. You may remember, that *Saul* had no sooner mustered his numerous Army at *Bezek*, and seen the surprising Readiness with which they had complied with his Commands, than both he and they drew from it an happy Omen ; and, as if they had been divinely inspired, or assured of gaining the Victory, send a positive Promise to the *Jabeshites*, that they should receive the desired Assistance, and be delivered from the impending Danger, by the next rising

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rising Sun (g): In which they not only proved true Prophets, but, by the Divine Blessing, performed even more than they had promised (and perhaps more than they could have hoped for), in the total Overthrow they gave to the Enemy. But now, alas! how different a Prospect doth your late Behaviour afford me, from that of the brave and generous *Hebrews* I have been entertaining you with! We are here met together, to beg the Divine Blessing, on an Expedition of no less Importance to *England*, than the Deliverance of the *Jabeshites* was to the *Israelitish* Nation; and which would yield you no less an Harvest of Laurels, than that did to them. And had you but shewn the same generous Ardor for the saving of a Mother City, and with it some Thousands of brave loyal Fellow-Subjects, from the impending Danger of falling into the Hands of a no less cruel and inveterate Enemy; it might have been justly looked upon as an Earnest of the Divine Assistance crowning you with the same Success.

But oh! what shall I say, or hope for, when I reflect on your late shameful Defection,

(g) 1 Sam. xi. 8, & 9.

ction, little short of a Revolt, compared with the glowing and generous Heat with which those *Hebrew* Soldiers underwent greater Fatigues and Difficulties, than any you can complain of, to come at the Victory, on an Occasion of much less Consequence to their Commonwealth, than this you are summoned to is to ours? *Jabesh*, being on the other Side *Jordan*, might have been lost without endangering any more than the small Canton round about it; whereas, on the saving or losing of this, depends, for ought we know, the Honour and Safety of our King and Country, the Preservation of our Religion, Liberties, and whatever is, or ought to be, most dearly valued by us. Our brave *English Jabeshites* are not, indeed, threatened with so dreadful a Brand of Infamy, as the Loss of their Right Eyes, with that of their Liberty; but will not their Valour, and unshaken Loyalty, expose them to as dismal a Fate, and to all the cruel Insults of an enraged Enemy? And will they not rather choose to die Sword in Hand, in Defence of so noble and interesting a Cause, than to save their Lives at the Expence of their Honour and Loyalty? And can it be possible, that you should, with your
Eyes

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Eyes open, or rather judicially blinded, suffer so many thousand noble and valuable Lives, and never more so than at this fatal Crisis, to be sacrificed to your Baseness and Treachery, to the Shame and Reproach of the *English* Name? What if your Commanders have, perhaps, shewed a little less Regard to your Conveniency, than to the Urgency of the present Occasion, which calls you to fight *pro aris & focis*, and justly challenges your utmost Courage and Speed; and in which we must consequently be all either Actors or Traitors; either reach the wished for Port of Victory, or be shipwrecked in the Ocean of an ignominious Slavery? Could it ever have been thought, that so great a Part of an *English* Army should grudge a few more long Strides to reach the Enemy, before they can be joined by the strong Reinforcement, which they only wait for, to renew the Attack with greater Vigour and Efficacy? And which, if once received, will infallibly turn the Scale on their Side, and render all our Efforts against them more difficult and dangerous, if not to end in our total Defeat, and the Ruin of our Country? You will please to observe, that I have all along forbore entering into a strict Inquiry

Inquiry into the Motives of your present Discontent, as a Matter quite out of my Province, and which may be more safely referred to those whom Providence has set over you; and are best acquainted with our present Exigencies, and the properest means of supplying of them. But it behoves me here to take Notice to you, of a strange Saying, now current amongst you, which is become a kind of Watch-word, and gives one but too much Reason to think, that some Veterans have been the Leaders of this rebellious Dance. I mean that Text in *Job* (b), that *Wisdom is with the Antients*: By which you would seem to insinuate, as if those few old Leaders knew much better what is fit, or not fit, to be done, upon this Emergency, than those who sit at the Helm, and have a Right to direct and command you. But, let me tell you, this is another of your bungling Ways of interpreting the Scriptures; and that *Job* meant nothing less, than what you would extort from him: He expected, indeed, to have found it so; and that his three old Visitors would have proved much better Counsellors and Comforters than they did: But, upon

(b) *Job* xii. 11.

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finding himself sadly disappointed, you may see plainly enough, that he scruples not to expose both their boasted Wisdom and Kindness in such strong Terms, as they indeed deserved. Nay, you'll find, if you read on but to the thirty-second and following Chapters, how *Elibu*, tho' a much younger and modefter Person, display'd a much higher Degree of Wisdom, and sublimer Theology, than they all; and how severely God himself reproved those three Pretenders, for their Vanity and Folly: And I doubt not but those Antients, who are the Fomenters of your present Discontent, will, upon a fuller Inquiry, be found to be Men of the same, if not worse, Leaven; wise indeed in their own and your Opinion, but Traitors in their Hearts. But what I would gladly know is, what Arguments these old Pretenders to superior Wisdom could use, to draw you into this dangerous and shameful Step: Not surely such as flow from Scripture; for that plainly tells you, that Obedience is better than Sacrifice; and that Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft (1 Sam. xv. 23.): Nor yet from Reason; for that goes Hand in Hand with the Word of God; and both will tell you, that Anarchy

and Ruin must be the necessary Consequence of all such unnatural Defections, if not timely suppressed, when our All lies at Stake, as it doth now. What then could they urge to fascinate and bewitch you into this base Disloyalty? Have they chilled your dastardly Hearts with the false Pretence of some great Disparity between you and the Enemy you are to engage? At present, Thanks be to God, you are greatly superior to them in Number; and might be much more so in Strength and Courage, would but your turbulent Spirit suffer you to consider, what a just Cause you are engaged in, and what Reason there is to hope, that we have a just God on our Side. And you, as well as I, may well enough remember the times when this very last Consideration would have inspired an *English* Host, on an Occasion like this, with such noble Ardour, that they would have despised much greater Difficulties to attack an Enemy, though in all other respects superior to them. The Time was, I say, and you cannot but know, when the Greatness of the Danger, Fatigues, or other Obstacles, would, on such an Emergency as you are now called upon, have only served to whet their Appetite,

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tite, and inflame their Hearts with a noble Ardor, either to conquer or die in so honourable a Cause: Whence then this strange, this shameful, this ill-boding, Change? Hath your old martial Genius forsaken you? Are Loyalty to your King, the Love of your Country, and Zeal for our Religion, so far extinguished in you, by a few Days unusual Fatigue, that you should all appear thus resolutely, or rather treacherously, bent against complying with the Orders of your Commanders, and acting with the requisite Dispatch, which alone, for aught you know, can prevent our present Danger from becoming desperate, and the Loss of our Laws and Liberties irretrievable? How shall we interpret this monstrous Behaviour, this unnatural Defection, of yours? Must we take it as a sad Omen, that God hath forgot to be gracious to this once happy Isle? and that he will no longer protect our religious and civil Rights, against the avowed Enemies of both? Good Heaven preserve us from so ungrateful a Despondency! God is still able to save us, whether by few or many; and is never more ready to do so, than when called upon in our greatest Extremities. And should you still obstinately persist in your

A a

Disobedience,

Disobedience, or even turn your Arms against your native Country—But Heaven be praised, who bids me, by your relenting Tears, and sudden Change, to hope for better things; and to expect a quite contrary Behaviour, from you! A Behaviour, worthy of the *English* Blood you boast of; and such as will not only wipe off the Shame and Disgrace of your base Murmurings and Complaints, but yield you, in a few Days, a plentiful Harvest of Laurels, and to the Nation a joyful Occasion of Thanksgiving: Whilst the Remorse for your late Defection inspires your Hearts with fresh Motives of Courage and Loyalty, and with such Confidence in God, and Pity for your distressed Fellow-Subjects, as may bring down a Blessing from Heaven upon our present Expedition. Heaven alone knows what will be the Effect of this happy Change I perceive in you: I may, perhaps, have given my Hopes too great a Scope; we are naturally apt to do so in things which we most earnestly wish; and, for that Reason, am the more willing to submit the Event of it to him, who alone could so timely work it in you: For, if it prove sincere and lasting, I shall have much greater Cause to ascribe it to his
Grace,

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Grace, than to any thing that I did, or could have pressed, upon the present Occasion, from that singular and successful Example of the generous *Hebrew* Monarch. And if his Goodness should magnify itself still further in our Favour, and crown this present Enterprize with the desired Success; if the same Divine Assistance, which seems to have thus timely rekindled your wonted Valour and Courage in your Breasts, should farther enable you, as it did those noble *Hebrews*, not only to free your distressed Fellow-Subjects from the impending Danger they are in, but to give the Enemies of our Country as total an Overthrow as they did to theirs; if this, I say, should prove the happy Issue of this Expedition, I shall have the less to say to you, by way of Warning; since your late Misbehaviour and Defection, duly laid to Heart, will be the best Antidote I can give you, against your becoming insolent and arrogant, or your ascribing any Part of the Glory to any, but to his divine and all-gracious Providence.

However, as there may be still some Cause to fear, lest this sudden and unhop'd for

Change should not prove so steady and universal, as I do heartily wish it to be; and lest there should still remain, in any of your Breasts, some bitter Root of Discontent and Murmuring against your Superiors; I shall conclude this Discourse with one Consideration more, which I earnestly advise you to mind (whatever else you may think unworthy your Attention with respect to what I have hitherto said); and that is, that if there be still any such amongst you, that have so far hardened themselves against the Sword of the Spirit, by which I have been striving to reduce you to a Sense of your Duty and Loyalty, and is the only kind of Weapon that our Church is allowed to use; they will find, to their Cost and Sorrow, that the State is entrusted to, and, Thanks be to Heaven, is still in Possession of, one of a much harder Metal, and keener Edge, and such as will admit of no Resistance. And this I am bound in Duty to remind you of, more particularly at this time, not only as it is equally granted by God, for the Punishment of the stubborn and disloyal, as for the Preservation and Defence of the peaceable and liege Subject (i); but likewise,

as

(i) Rom. xiii. 2, & seq.

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as it cannot be made use of to a better and more honourable End, than against the base and cowardly Betrayers, as well as against the open and avowed Invaders, of our civil and religious Rights and Properties. But I must call to mind, that you will, in a few Hours, be summoned to march; and shall close this Discourse, as the Prophet Samuel did to the murmuring Israelites (k); *As for me, God forbid that I should cease praying and interceding for you, and shewing you the good and right Way; your Duty to your King and Country, and the Guilt and Danger of opposing yourselves against it! And may the Divine Goodness inspire your Breasts with such a Sense of both, that you may all behave, on the approaching Juncture, as becomes Englishmen and Protestants; that our Meeting on the next Sabbath-Day may be such, as may afford a joyful Subject for Praise and Thanksgiving, for the Success of this Expedition. Amen.*

(k) 1 Sam. xii. 23.

The CONCLUSION.

THUS far, Sir, went this occasional Discourse, which, as I formerly hinted to you, had the desired Effect, on the lower Class of the Audience, to whom it seemed chiefly directed; tho', in Fact, principally levelled against the Heads of those Malecontents. You will excuse me, if my Fear of hurting some of them, who are still alive, and, I hope, in a better Mind, restrains me from giving you any farther Account of the Occasion of it, than that the underhand Promoters of this Defection being mostly professed Deists and Republicans, though, in other respects, Men of Figure and Authority, there was an absolute Necessity to draw away the inferior Officers and Soldiers from the implicit Confidence they put in them: And this, it was thought, could not be more effectually done, considering the Shortness of the time, than by causing some such rousing Discourse as this to be penned, and preached to them; and, at the same time, by making Choice of some such curious and uncommon Topics, as might, as much as possible, engross

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gross the Attention of those Leaders, who were Men of Parts, and polite Literature, in order to prevent their causing any Disturbance, which might interrupt the Preacher from going on.

The Task of penning it being imposed upon me, the Urgency of the Occasion, and the short time given me to perform it, soon brought into my Mind that noble and signal Overthrow, which *Saul*, the new *Hebrew* King, gave to the *Ammonites*; a Subject upon which I had formerly bestowed some Pains, and which now appeared to me so suitable to the Occasion, that I immediately set about and dressed it up in the Form, Method and very Words, in which you have seen it above; excepting only that I have thrown some Geographical, and other explanatory Remarks, into Notes; which, in some measure, clogged and interrupted the Style of the Text. An Inconveniency which could not be so well avoided, in a Discourse that was to be delivered off-hand to an Audience, as when it is penned to be read at one's Leisure. However, the Piece was listened to without Interruption; and was scarcely

scarcely finished, before the good Effect of it appeared, in the surprising Change it wrought on the malecontent Troops, as well as in the Success that crowned, soon after, their retrieved Loyalty and Bravery.

I shall take it as a Favour, if you'll let me know, in your next, how it is relished by your Sceptic Neighbours; after which I shall readily send you my Answers to their remaining Queries and Objections, with all the Dispatch I am able to make: Being, in the Interim,

Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.



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